

# You Just Don't Understand: Troubled Engagements Between Feminists and IR Theorists

J. ANN TICKNER

*School of International Relations,  
University of Southern California*

This article reconstructs some conversational encounters between feminists and IR theorists and offers some hypotheses as to why misunderstandings so frequently result from these encounters. It claims that contemporary feminist perspectives on international relations are based on ontologies and epistemologies that are quite different from those that inform the conventional discipline. Therefore, they do not fit comfortably within conventional state-centric and structural approaches to IR theorizing, nor with the methodologies usually employed by IR scholars. As an illustration of how these differences can cause misunderstandings, the article offers some feminist perspectives on security, a concept central to the discipline. It also suggests how feminist approaches can offer some new ways to understand contemporary security problems. In conclusion, it suggests how feminist/IR engagements might be pursued more constructively.

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Since feminist approaches to international relations first made their appearance in the late 1980s, courses on women and world politics and publications in this area have proliferated rapidly, as have panels at professional meetings.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the effect on the mainstream discipline, particularly in the United States, continues to be marginal, and the lack of attention paid to feminist perspectives by other critical approaches has also been disappointing (Sylvester, 1994b:ch. 4). While feminist scholars, as well as a few IR theorists, have called for conversations and dialogue across paradigms (Keohane, 1989; Peterson, 1992b:184), few public conversations

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*Author's note:* An earlier draft of this article was written while I was a Visiting Fellow in the Department of International Relations, RSPAS, Australian National University. I should like to thank Andrew Mack and members of the Department for providing a supportive environment. Special thanks for helpful comments to Hayward Alker, Hilary Charlesworth, Greg Frye, Sandra Harding, Robert Keohane, Gavin Mount, Cindy O'Hagen, Anne Orford, Jan Jindy Pettman, Jim Richardson, and the editors and anonymous reviewers of *ISQ*. Thanks also to students in my Gender and International Relations graduate seminar at USC where constructive conversations were pursued.

<sup>1</sup> In defining this literature as new, I am referring to recent work that is critiquing international relations theory from a variety of feminist perspectives and reconstructing international relations through gender-sensitive lenses. For some examples see Enloe, 1990, Grant and Newland, 1991, Peterson, 1992a, Tickner, 1992, Sylvester, 1994b, and Pettman, 1996. Of course, I am aware of the impossibility of trying to represent a very rich and diverse literature adequately in one paper.

or debates have occurred.<sup>2</sup> These continuing silences have led one scholar working in this area to conclude that most women are homeless as far as the canons of IR knowledge are concerned (Sylvester, 1994a:316).

Linguist Deborah Tannen, from whose widely read book the title of this article is taken, asserts that everyday conversations between women and men are cross-cultural and fraught with all the misunderstandings and talking at cross-purposes that cross-cultural communications frequently incur (Tannen, 1990).<sup>3</sup> The lack of sustained dialogue or substantively focused debates between feminists and scholars of international relations is troubling. Could this reluctance to engage in similarly difficult cross-cultural conversations be due to the very different realities and epistemologies with which feminists and international relations scholars are working?

Although critical engagement is rare, evidence of awkward silences and miscommunications can be found in the oral questions and comments IR-trained feminists frequently encounter when presenting their work to IR audiences. Having articulated what seems to her (or him)<sup>4</sup> to be a reasoned feminist critique of international relations, or some suggestions as to the potential benefits of looking at IR through “gender-sensitive” lenses, a feminist scholar is often surprised to find that her audience does not engage with what, to her at least, are the main claims of her presentation. Questioners may assert that her presentation has little to do with the discipline of international relations or the practice of international politics.<sup>5</sup> Prefaced by affirmations that the material presented is genuinely interesting and important, questions such as the following are frequently asked: What does this talk have to do with solving “real-world” problems such as Bosnia, Northern Ireland or nuclear proliferation?<sup>6</sup> Why does gender have anything to do with explaining the behavior of states in the international system? Isn't IR a gender-neutral discipline? More unsettling are comments suggesting that the presentation is personally insulting to the audience, or that the material is more suitable for bedside reading than for serious scholarly discussion.

Furthermore, to scholars trained in conventional scientific methodologies, feminist approaches appear to be atheoretical—merely criticism, devoid of potential for fruitful empirical research. Therefore, they ask: Where is your research program? or: Why can't women just as well be subsumed under established theoretical

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<sup>2</sup> One recent article that does engage in a critique of some feminist literature is Jones (1996). Certain introductory IR texts have begun to incorporate feminist approaches. See for examples Rourke (1993) and Goldstein (1994). As yet, feminist articles in mainstream U.S./IR journals have been rare. There has been some recognition of critical approaches other than feminism by the mainstream; however, they have often been dismissed or assessed quite negatively, particularly postmodernism. For a more constructive engagement see Keohane (1988) and the response by Walker (1989).

<sup>3</sup> While *You Just Don't Understand* is a popular, somewhat stereotypical book, it is, I believe, a useful entry point for offering insights into the problems of gendered cross-cultural communications. It comes out of a rich tradition of gender-sensitive discourse analysis many of whose classics are cited in Tannen's bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> I am not saying that men cannot engage in feminist or gender analysis; indeed, gender is not just about women. However, it is usually women and feminists who write about gender issues. The main reason for this is that what it means to be human has generally been equated with (often Western elite) men. As feminists point out, women have often been rendered less than fully human, or even invisible, by this move. Revelations of the gender biases of medical research are an important illustration of this.

<sup>5</sup> I am drawing on fairly widely shared experiences that I and other feminist scholars have had when speaking to IR audiences. I cannot analyze these engagements more systematically since these types of comments rarely appear in print.

<sup>6</sup> That this happens frequently is supported by the title of an article by Marysia Zalewski (1995), “Well, What Is the Feminist Perspective on Bosnia?” Zalewski suggests that the reason for the frequency of such questions is that feminist theory has only recently infiltrated the discipline. I believe that their frequency is the result of a much deeper level of misunderstanding.

approaches? Assuming the idealist notion that women are more peaceful than men lurks somewhere behind the presenter's remarks, a questioner may challenge this unasserted claim by referring to Margaret Thatcher or Golda Meir. Believing these questions to be indications of an audience unfamiliar with, or even threatened by, feminist subject matter, a frustrated presenter may well wish to declare: You just don't understand.

These often unsatisfactory oral engagements illustrate a gendered estrangement that inhibits more sustained conversations, both oral and written, between feminists and other international relations scholars. I am not saying that this is an estrangement that pits men against women. A majority of IR women scholars do not work with feminist approaches, and some men do use gender as a category of analysis. Nevertheless, I do believe, and will argue below, that these theoretical divides evidence socially constructed gender differences. Understanding them as such may be a useful entry point for overcoming silences and miscommunications, thus beginning more constructive dialogues.

In this article I explore the implications and apparent presuppositions of some of these frequently asked questions. I will demonstrate that feminists and IR scholars are drawing on very different realities and using different epistemologies when they engage in theorizing about international relations. It is my belief that these differences themselves are gendered, with all the difficulties of cross-cultural communication that this implies.

While misunderstandings occur in both directions, I will focus on feminist responses to questions and comments from conventional IR scholars because these are less familiar to IR audiences. Because I believe it is where the greatest misunderstandings occur, I have chosen to engage with methodologically conventional IR scholars—whom I define as realists, neorealists, neoliberals, peace researchers, behavioralists, and empiricists committed to data-based methods of testing, rather than with recent critical approaches, associated with post-positivist methodologies as defined in the third debate (Lapid, 1989).<sup>7</sup> I realize there are significant differences between these conventional approaches. However, none of them has used gender as a category of analysis; it is in this sense, as well as in their shared commitment to a scientific methodology, that I have grouped them together.

There are three types of misunderstandings embedded in the questions outlined above: first, misunderstandings about the meaning of gender as manifested in the more personal reactions; second, the different realities or ontologies that feminists and nonfeminists see when they write about international politics, evident in comments that feminist scholars are not engaging the subject matter of IR; third, the epistemological divides that underlie questions as to whether feminists are doing theory at all.

Summarizing some work from a variety of feminist approaches, I will discuss each of these issues in the first part of this article. The second part offers some feminist perspectives on security and suggests how these perspectives might contribute to new ways of understanding contemporary security problems. This is not intended as an extensive feminist analysis of security but, rather, as a more concrete illustration of some of the issues raised in part one—that is, how misunderstandings can occur when feminists analyze IR issues. In conclusion, I will offer some thoughts on how these troubling feminist/nonfeminist IR engagements might be pursued more constructively.

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<sup>7</sup> For examples of where I have engaged more systematically with some of these approaches I have defined as conventional see Tickner, 1988, 1992, 1994.

### Sources of Misunderstanding

#### *Gender: Is the Personal International?*

Responding to a call to change the name of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters to include a recognition of its 30 percent female membership, James Hoffa asserted that the name should remain because “the definition of brotherhood is that it’s neutral” (*New York Times*, 1996). While scholars of international relations, aware of the need to pay attention to gender-sensitive language, would probably want to claim some distance from this statement, it does indicate how, all too often, claims of gender neutrality mask deeply embedded masculinist assumptions which can naturalize or hide gender differences and gender inequalities. As documented above, even amongst the most sophisticated audiences, feminist challenges to these assumptions can often appear threatening, even when “male-bashing” is not intended.<sup>8</sup> Deborah Tannen has suggested that the reason gender differences are more troubling than other cross-cultural differences is that they occur where the home and hearth are: “[W]e enact and create our gender, and our inequality, with every move that we make” (Tannen, 1990:283). Feminist scholars claim that gender differences permeate all facets of public and private life, a socially constructed divide which they take to be problematic in itself; IR scholars, however, may believe that gender is about interpersonal relations between women and men, but not about international politics.

Given that most contemporary feminist scholarship takes gender—which embodies relationships of power inequality—as its central category of analysis, the fact that the meaning of gender is so often misunderstood is, I believe, central to problems of misunderstanding and miscommunication. Almost all feminists who write about international relations use gender in a social constructivist sense, a move that many see not only as necessary for overcoming gender discrimination, but also as a way of opening avenues for communication by avoiding some of the threatened responses illustrated above.

As Sandra Harding (1986:17–8) has suggested, gendered social life is produced through three distinct processes: assigning dualistic gender metaphors to various perceived dichotomies, appealing to these gender dualisms to organize social activity, and dividing necessary social activities between different groups of humans. She refers to these three aspects of gender as gender symbolism, gender structure, and individual gender.

Feminists define gender, in the symbolic sense, as a set of variable but socially and culturally constructed characteristics—such as power, autonomy, rationality, and public—that are stereotypically associated with masculinity. Their opposites—weakness, dependence, emotion, and private—are associated with femininity. There is evidence to suggest that both women and men assign a more positive value to masculine characteristics. Importantly, definitions of masculinity and femininity are relational and depend on each other for their meaning; in other words, what it means to be a “real man” is not to display “womanly” weaknesses. Since these characteristics are social constructions, it is entirely possible for Margaret Thatcher to act like an iron lady or a “real man”; in fact, many feminists would argue that such behavior is necessary for both women and men to succeed in the tough world of international politics. As Tannen (1990:43) claims, girls and boys grow up in different worlds of words, but gender goes beyond language: it is a symbolic system that shapes many aspects of our culture. As Carol Cohn (1993:229) has suggested, even if real men and women do not fit these gender “ideals,” the

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<sup>8</sup> Conversely, dangers lurk in the uncritical switch to gender-neutral language when it is used even when the speaker is clearly not speaking for or about women. See Okin, 1989:10–3, for elaboration of this point.

existence of this system of meaning affects us all—both our interpretations of the world and the way the world understands us.

As Joan Scott (1986:1069) claims, while the forms gender relations take across different cultures may vary, they are almost always unequal; therefore, gender, in the structural sense, is a primary way of signifying relationships of power. Although gender is frequently seen as belonging in the household and, therefore, antithetical to the “real” business of politics, a reason why it is often seen as irrelevant to IR, Scott argues that it is constructed in the economy and the polity through various institutional structures that have the effect of “naturalizing,” and even legalizing, women’s inferior status. Recent feminist writings that deal with issues of race and class problematize these power relationships still further.<sup>9</sup>

Individual gender relations enter into and are constituent elements in every aspect of human experience (Flax, 1987:624). Jane Flax reminds us that, while feminism is about recovering women’s activities, it must also be aware of how these activities are constituted through the social relations in which they are situated. Therefore, gender is not just about women; it is also about men and masculinity, a point that needs to be emphasized if scholars of international relations are to better understand why feminists claim that it is relevant to their discipline and why they believe that a gendered analysis of its basic assumptions and concepts can yield fruitful results.

*Theorizing the International: Are Feminists Really “Doing” IR?*

Deborah Tannen (1990:97) claims that women are more comfortable than men with an ethnographic style of individually oriented story-telling typical of anthropology, a difference that fits IR scholarship as well. International relations, particularly after the move toward science in the post-World War II period in the United States, has generally shied away from level-one analysis, preferring a more systemic or state-oriented focus. Coming out of literatures that are centrally concerned with individuals and social relations, and that are more explicitly normative, feminist perspectives, on the other hand, demonstrate a preference for more humanistically oriented methodologies. Although their focus is different, their discomfort with structural IR is similar to that captured in Martin Wight’s famous title, “Why Is There No International Theory?”

In “Why Is There No International Theory?” Martin Wight (1995) remarked on the absence of an international theoretical tradition comparable to the very rich historical tradition of Western political philosophy.<sup>10</sup> According to Wight, the reason for this absence can be found in the character of the international system. Theorizing the international would mean speculating about a society or community of states. Since he saw the international system as evidencing the absence of society, a “realm of necessity” characterized by “recurrence and repetition,” Wight (1995:32) claimed that there could be no “progressive” international theory, only a “theory of

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<sup>9</sup> For example, as Bell Hooks (1984) claims, nonwhite women would not subscribe to the feminist goal of making women equal to men who are themselves victims of racist oppression. I am aware of the importance of including class and race differences when defining and analyzing gender and women’s oppression. However, I do not believe this should prevent us from making testable, generalizable claims about the gendering of the discipline of international relations. For a useful discussion of this issue more generally see Martin, 1994.

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that certain IR feminists have expressed some affinity with classical realism and/or more sociological approaches associated with the English School. Whitworth (1989:268) claims that the classical realism of Morgenthau acknowledges that meaning is contingent and socially constructed, thus creating a space, in theory if not in practice, for the analysis of gender. The authors chosen by James Der Derian for his edited volume *International Theory* (1995), which includes Wight’s piece, illustrate the link between the English School and some other contemporary critical perspectives. It also includes American scholars of the scientific tradition. I have chosen to cite from this volume, rather than going back to the original sources, for this reason.

survival” marked by “an intellectual and moral poverty.”<sup>11</sup> Wight is, of course, using theory in an explicitly normative sense, not fashionable amongst contemporary, more scientific theoretical approaches. He is postulating a “theory of the good life” (Wight, 1995:32), a progressive theory of social relations that calls for societal improvements, improvements, Wight claims, that can take place only within a political space such as the state.

While many contemporary feminist theorists would take issue with Wight’s views on equating progressive theory with a tradition of Western political thought that has generally either excluded women altogether or treated them as less than fully human (Okin, 1980),<sup>12</sup> his reasons for claiming the poverty of international theory have relevance for problems feminists encounter when theorizing the international. With an ontology based on unitary states operating in an asocial, anarchical international environment, there is little in realist theory that provides an entry point for feminist theories, grounded as they are in an epistemology that takes social relations as its central category of analysis.<sup>13</sup>

As demonstrated above, much of contemporary feminism is also committed to progressive or emancipatory goals, particularly the goal of achieving equality for women through the elimination of unequal gender relations. Drawing on earlier literatures, such as those on women in the military and women and development, feminist writings on international relations have focused on individuals in their social, political, and economic settings, rather than on decontextualized unitary states and anarchical international structures. They investigate how military conflict and the behavior of states in the international system are constructed through, or embedded in, unequal gendered structural relations and how these affect the life chances of individuals, particularly women. These very different foci evoke the kind of questions introduced above about what is the legitimate subject matter of the discipline.

Returning to Martin Wight’s discomfort with the realist tradition, with which feminists might find some common ground, could we find an entry point for feminist theorizing about the international system in approaches that start with different assumptions? Given a high level of economic interdependence, the growth of transnational nonstate actors, and the proliferation of international institutions, many IR scholars, particularly liberals with progressivist views of the international arena, prefer to work in the Grotian or Kantian traditions which postulate not an anarchy, but an international society of states within which a discussion of social relations becomes possible. Writing in the Kantian tradition, Andrew Linklater (1982) offers a critique of Wight. While acknowledging the tension between man as a universal category and citizens bound by loyalties to their states, Linklater postulates a Kantian resolution: “[B]ecause modern citizens are more than mere members of their communities, since they are responsive to universalistic moral claims, it is within their power to transform international relations in a direction which realises their capacity to lead free lives” (Linklater, 1982:18). “Kant held that all men were bound together by the necessary obligation to so arrange their social and political lives that they could gradually realise a condition of universal justice and perpetual peace. . . . [These] were essential or categorical ends which men were

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<sup>11</sup> Here Wight is presenting a realist worldview. However, it is difficult to place Wight exclusively within any one of the three theoretical traditions that he himself outlined. For further elaboration of this point see Yost, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Feminist perspectives on international relations have focused on the explicitly gendered writings of political philosophers, such as Hobbes and Machiavelli, whose works have served as foundational texts for the discipline. See, for example, Grant, 1991, and Sylvester, 1994a.

<sup>13</sup> For further elaboration on these ontological distinctions, as well as on the problems of articulating a world politics beyond the state, see Walker, 1992.



under an unconditional obligation to promote by virtue of their rational nature” (Linklater, 1982:97).

The Kantian ethic, a progressive interpretation of international relations, is one of the important foundations of the so-called idealist tradition, a tradition to which feminist writings in international relations are often mistakenly assigned by international relations scholars.<sup>14</sup> In spite of its commitment to emancipatory goals of justice and peace which, in theory at least, could include the elimination of unjust social relations, this tradition is also problematic for feminists (Sylvester, 1994b:94). Western theories of universal justice, built on a rather abstract concept of rationality, have generally been constructed out of a definition of human nature that excludes or diminishes women. Feminists assert that the universalism they defend is defined by identifying the experience of a special group, (elite men), as paradigmatic of human beings as a whole (Benhabib, 1987:81). Most Western political theorists were quite explicit in their claims that women either were not capable of, or should not be encouraged in, the attainment of enlightenment, autonomy, and rationality. For example, while Kant viewed the development of rationality as necessary for the formation of a moral character, he denied that women were capable of such achievements; he also recommended against the education of women because it would inhibit man’s development (Tuana, 1992:52–3).<sup>15</sup>

While IR scholars might argue that Kant’s views on women were a time-bound premise which can safely be discarded in today’s more gender-sensitive climate, feminists believe that the Western philosophical tradition is too deeply implicated in masculinist assumptions to serve as a foundation for constructing a gender-sensitive IR. Therefore, the gender biases of this tradition, which are fundamental to its normative orientation, must be exposed and challenged. For this reason, feminists claim that works that have served as foundational texts for international relations must be reexamined for evidence of gender biases which call into question the gender neutrality frequently claimed in response to feminist critiques. In the words of one feminist theorist, “all forms of feminist theorizing are normative in the sense that they help us to question certain meanings and interpretations in IR theory” (Sylvester, 1994a:318). However, challenging the core assumptions, concepts, and ontological presuppositions of the field with claims of gender bias are bound to result in miscommunications and to make conversations with international theorists difficult.

*Epistemological Divides: Where Is Your Research Program?*

*International Theory.* In his commentary on Wight’s piece, discussed earlier, Hans Morgenthau (1995) asserted that international theory could be progressive but in a rather different sense: “[T]he ideal toward which these theories try to progress is ultimately international peace and order to be achieved through scientific precision and predictability in understanding and manipulating international

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<sup>14</sup> Feminists believe that labeling their work as idealism is often a mistake. They claim they are describing a reality rarely acknowledged in the discipline. I use the term *so-called* when referring to idealism because the label was invented by realists and it is one that has contributed to the delegitimation of the idealist tradition. It is interesting to note that the language of the realist/idealist debate has gendered connotations. Communitarian, liberal, or cosmopolitan might serve as better definitions of this rich tradition. However, women’s voices and gender analysis have been absent also from international law from which the cosmopolitan and communitarian traditions have drawn inspiration (see Charlesworth, Chinkin, and Wright, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> I am aware that the exclusion of women from traditions of universalist ethics and justice is quite a different issue from postulating a universalist ethic that could include women. Indeed, this is an important and contentious issue in feminist theories of justice. For positions on both sides of this debate see various chapters in Nussbaum and Glover, 1995.

affairs" (Morgenthau, 1995:40). For Morgenthau, the purpose of theory was "to bring order and meaning into a mass of unconnected material and to increase knowledge through the logical development of certain propositions empirically established" (Morgenthau, 1995:46). Unlike Wight, Morgenthau, motivated by countering German fascism of the 1930s, was making the case for a scientific international theory, a type of theory that has strongly influenced mainstream international relations, at least in the United States.<sup>16</sup>

As I shall discuss below, this view of the purposes of theory is one that feminists have found problematic. However, feminists often misunderstand or ignore the rationale for the search for more scientific theories offered by early realists such as Morgenthau. Most of the founding fathers of American realism in the post-World War II period were European intellectuals fleeing from Nazi persecution. Flagrant violations of international law and abuses of human rights in the name of German nationalism motivated Morgenthau, and other early realists, to dissociate the realm of morality and values from the *realpolitik* of international politics. Painting a gloomy picture of "political man," and the dangers of an anarchic international system, Morgenthau claimed that war was always a possibility. However, he believed that the search for deeper explanations of the laws that govern human action could contribute to lessening the chances that such disasters would recur in the future.<sup>17</sup> Defending science against ideologically charged claims, which he associated with European fascism of the 1930s, Morgenthau believed that only by a more "scientific" understanding of its causes could the likelihood of war be diminished.

According to Stanley Hoffmann (1977), Morgenthau shaped these truths as a guide to those in power; thus, the growth of the discipline cannot be separated from the growing American role in world affairs in the post-World War II era. Speaking to and moving among foreign policy elites, this "American discipline" was, and is, aimed at an audience very different from feminist international relations. This difference—to which I return below—also causes misunderstandings.

The scientific turn in postwar realism was also adopted by behavioralists, neorealists, liberal institutionalists, and some peace researchers, all of whom drew on models from the natural sciences and from economics to build their theories. Seeking scientific respectability, international theorists turned to the natural sciences for their methodologies; many of them were also defending the autonomy of rational inquiry against totalitarian ideologies, this time of postwar Communism. Theories were defined as sets of logically related, ideally causal propositions, to be empirically tested or falsified in the Popperian sense. Scientific research programs were developed from realist assumptions about the international system serving as the "hard core" (Lakatos and Musgrave, 1970). While international theorists never sought the precision of Newton's grand schemes of deterministic laws and inescapable forces, they did claim that the international system is more than the constant and regular behavior of its parts (Hollis and Smith, 1990:50). Popular in the discipline, structural theories account for behavior by searching for causes. These theorists believe that events are governed by the laws of nature; in other words, behavior is generated by structures external to the actors themselves (Hollis and Smith, 1990:3).<sup>18</sup> In all these endeavors, theorists have generally assumed the

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<sup>16</sup> Just as he was not considered scientific enough by many subsequent international theorists, Morgenthau was himself ambivalent about the turn to science in American international theory. For evidence of this ambivalence see Morgenthau, 1946. For an analysis of the reasons for the preference for scientific methodologies in the U.S. see Hoffmann, 1977.

<sup>17</sup> For a feminist critique of Morgenthau's six principles of political realism see Tickner, 1988.

<sup>18</sup> Hollis and Smith (1990) identify two traditions in international theory, "inside" and "outside." Since "inside" theories are interpretive or hermeneutical, feminist theories would probably fit more comfortably into this tradition, although it too presents problems for feminists. A tradition constructed out of the beliefs and intentions of human actors has rarely included women as actors.



possibility as well as the desirability of conducting systematic and cumulative scientific research.

Borrowing from economics, game theory and rational choice theory became popular for explaining the choices and optimizing behavior of self-interested states in an anarchical international system as well as a means for interpreting the actions of their foreign policy decision makers. Given the dangers and unpredictability of such a system, theory building was motivated by the desire to control and predict (Waltz, 1979:6).<sup>19</sup> The search for systematic inquiry could, hopefully, contribute to the effort of diminishing the likelihood of future conflict. Broadly defined as positivist, this turn to science represents a view of the creation of knowledge based on four assumptions: first, a belief in the unity of science—that is, the same methodologies can apply in the natural and social worlds; second, that there is a distinction between facts and values, with facts being neutral between theories; third, that the social world has regularities like the natural world; and fourth, that the way to determine the truth of statements is by appeal to neutral facts or an empiricist epistemology (Smith, 1997:168).<sup>20</sup>

*Feminist Theory.* Since it entered the field of international relations in the late 1980s, feminist theory has often, but not exclusively, been located within the critical voices of the “third debate,” a term articulated by Yosef Lapid (1989). Although they are not all postmodern, or even post-Enlightenment, in their normative orientation at least, an assumption sometimes implied by conventional scholars, many contemporary feminist international relations scholars would identify themselves as post-positivists in terms of Lapid’s articulation of the term and in terms of the definition of positivism outlined above. While there is no necessary connection between feminist approaches and post-positivism, there is a strong resonance for a variety of reasons including a commitment to epistemological pluralism as well as to certain ontological sensitivities. With a preference for hermeneutic, historically based, humanistic and philosophical traditions of knowledge cumulation, rather than those based on the natural sciences, feminist theorists are often skeptical of empiricist methodologies that claim neutrality of facts. While many feminists do see structural regularities, such as gender and patriarchy, they define them as socially constructed and variable across time, place, and cultures, rather than as universal and natural.

Agreeing with Robert Cox’s assertion that theory is always for someone and for some purpose, the goal of feminist approaches is similar to that of critical theory as defined by Cox. While not all historians would accept this link, Cox asserts that critical theory “stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how that order came about”: it can, therefore, be a guide to strategic action for bringing about an alternative order (Cox, 1981:129–30).

Cox contrasts critical theory with conventional theory which he labels “problem-solving,”—a type of conversation that Tannen associates with men (1990:ch. 2). Problem-solving takes the world as it finds it and implicitly accepts the prevailing order as its framework (Cox, 1981:130). Since feminist theorists believe that the world is characterized by gender hierarchies that are detrimental to women, they would be unlikely to take such an epistemological stance. In the words of one

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<sup>19</sup> What level of prediction is desirable or possible is a matter of some contention amongst international theorists. Claims that international theorists failed to predict the end of the Cold War has added fuel to this debate (see Gaddis, 1992–93).

<sup>20</sup> Not all IR theorists, who associate themselves with the scientific tradition, would agree with all parts of this definition. Few social scientists believe that their work is value-free or that universally valid generalizations are possible; nevertheless, they would probably agree that these are useful standards to which to aspire. Most would believe, however, that systematic social scientific research is possible and desirable and that methodologies borrowed from the natural sciences can be useful, although some have recognized the problems of applying natural science methods to the social sciences. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer and to Harvey Starr for these observations.

feminist scholar who defines herself as a post-positivist, “postpositivism compels our attention to context and historical process, to contingency and uncertainty, to how we construct, rather than dis-cover, our world(s)” (Peterson, 1992a:57).

In constructing their approaches to international theory, feminists draw on a variety of philosophical traditions and literatures outside international relations and political science within which most IR scholars are trained. While IR feminists are seeking genuine knowledge that can help them to better understand the issues with which they are concerned, the IR training they receive rarely includes such knowledge. Hence, they, like scholars in other critical approaches, have gone outside the discipline to seek what they believe are more appropriate methodologies for understanding the social construction and maintenance of gender hierarchies. This deepens the level of misunderstanding and miscommunication and, unfortunately, often leads to negative stereotyping on all sides of these epistemological divides.

Feminist theories, variously identified as Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, standpoint, existentialist, and postmodern, describe the causes and consequences of women’s oppression and prescribe strategies for removing it;<sup>21</sup> thus, many of them are progressive in the sense in which Martin Wight was using the term. While psychoanalytic traditions look for causes of women’s inequality in socialization practices of early childhood, radicals, Marxists, and socialists look for explanations in structures of patriarchy which “naturalize” women’s oppression, or in the labor market with its gender discriminations and divisions between public (paid) and private (unpaid/domestic) work. As Carole Pateman (1994:21) has emphasized, feminism is more than a derivation from other bodies of political and social theory because it is centered on an investigation of the forms of power that men exercise over women.

All these feminist theoretical approaches, upon which IR feminists have drawn, are grounded in social and political theory and sociological traditions many of which lie outside the discipline of international relations. Therefore, while international theorists are often justifiably frustrated when feminists cannot provide a brief overview of feminist theory, feminists find communication on this issue with scholars trained in social scientific methodologies equally difficult because of the lack of agreement as to what counts as legitimate scientific inquiry. Since all these feminist approaches question the claim that women can simply be added to existing theoretical frameworks, it is predictable that misunderstandings will compound when those working within the scientific tradition suggest that feminist approaches can be incorporated into conventional IR methodologies. Indeed, feminists have a legitimate fear of cooptation; so often women’s knowledge has been forgotten or subsumed under more dominant discourses.<sup>22</sup>

Incorporation can also be a source of misunderstanding when international theorists, responding to challenges of gender blindness, have attempted to make women more visible in their texts. For, as Emily Rosenberg (1990) tells us, efforts to integrate women into existing theories and consider them equally with men can only lead to a theoretical cul-de-sac which further reinforces gender hierarchies. For example, in international relations, when we add exceptional women—the famous few such as Margaret Thatcher or Golda Meier who succeed in the tough

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<sup>21</sup> One must be wary of putting feminist perspectives into boxes, however. There is considerable overlap amongst approaches, and many theorists draw on a variety of intellectual traditions. The interdisciplinarity of feminism compounds the difficulties and limitations of categorizations. I am also aware that, as with my definition of conventional theory, I am conflating divergent bodies of scholarship. The unifying theme upon which I draw is that most feminist approaches take gender as a central category of analysis and seek to understand the sources of women’s oppression and how to end it. For a useful introductory overview of feminist theories see Tong, 1989.

<sup>22</sup> This issue of cooptation is evidenced in Weber’s (1994) critique of Keohane (1989) which called for an alliance between neoliberal institutionalism and standpoint feminism.

world of international politics by acting like men—to existing frameworks, it tends to imply, without the claim being made overtly, that the problem of their absence lies with women themselves. Conversely, if we go looking for women working in “women’s spheres,” such as peace groups, it only reinforces the socially constructed boundaries between activities differentially deemed appropriate for women and for men; moreover, it contributes to the false claim that women are more peaceful than men, a claim that disempowers both women and peace. Although feminists are frequently told that they are implying that women are more peaceful than men, many are actually quite suspicious of this association of women with peace. Besides being derivative of an essentialized position about women’s “nature,” to which most contemporary feminists do not subscribe, this association tends to brand women as naive and unrealistic, thereby further delegitimizing their voices in the world of foreign policy making (Sylvester, 1987; Elshtain, 1990).

Feminists are arguing for moving beyond knowledge frameworks that construct international theory without attention to gender and for searching deeper to find ways in which gender hierarchies serve to reinforce socially constructed institutions and practices that perpetuate different and unequal role expectations, expectations that have contributed to fundamental inequalities between women and men in the world of international politics. Therefore, including gender as a central category of analysis transforms knowledge in ways that go beyond adding women; importantly, but frequently misunderstood, this means that women cannot be studied in isolation from men.

While most feminists are committed to the emancipatory goal of achieving a more just society, which, for them, includes ending the oppression of women, the Kantian project of achieving this goal through Enlightenment knowledge is problematic because of feminist claims that this type of knowledge is gendered. Feminists assert that dichotomies, such as rational/irrational, fact/value, universal/particular, and public/private, upon which Western Enlightenment knowledge has been built and which they see as gendered, separate the mind (rationality) from the body (nature) and, therefore, diminish the legitimacy of women as “knowers.” Susan Heckman has claimed that, “since the Enlightenment, knowledge has been defined in terms of ‘man,’ the subject, and espouses an epistemology that is radically homocentric.” Since Enlightenment epistemology places women in an inferior position, outside the realm of rationality, challenging the priority of “man” in the modern episteme must be fundamental to any feminist program (Heckman, 1990:2). Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins (1989) claims that Black women would be unlikely to subscribe to an epistemology that has, for the most part, excluded Blacks and other minorities. Black women, she claims, prefer, and consider more legitimate, knowledge construction based on concrete experience of everyday lives, stories, and dialogues. These subjective epistemological positions are unsettling for scholars trained in scientific methodologies based on more abstract knowledge claims.

In her critique of the natural sciences, Evelyn Fox Keller (1985:89) asserts that modern Enlightenment science has incorporated a belief system that equates objectivity with masculinity and a set of cultural values that simultaneously elevates what is defined as scientific and what is defined as masculine. Throughout most of the history of the modern West, men have been seen as the knowers; what has counted as legitimate knowledge, in both the natural and social sciences, has generally been knowledge based on the lives of men in the public sphere. The separation of the public and private spheres, reinforced by the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, has resulted in the legitimation of what are perceived as the “rational” activities (such as politics, economics, and justice) in the former while devaluing the “natural” activities (such as household management, child-rearing, and care-giving) of the latter (Peterson, 1992b:202).

As Carole Pateman (1988:90) argues, in the seventeenth century women began to be deprived of the economic basis for independence by the separation of the workplace from the household and the consolidation of the patriarchal structures of capitalism. The separation of public and private spheres has also engendered a division between reason and feeling as the household, the “natural” site of women’s existence, became associated with moral sentiments as opposed to self-interest, more characteristic of the public world (Tronto, 1993:52–6), a split that has been particularly evident in rationalist theories of international relations. Feminists believe that the legitimation of particular types of knowledge, intensified by this public/private divide, shapes and restricts the kinds of questions that get asked and how they get answered.<sup>23</sup>

Stephen Toulmin (1990) analyzes the coincidence of the birth of the modern scientific method and the birth of the modern nation-state. He contrasts the scientific method with a “pre-modern” or “early modern” humanistic tradition, incorporating writers such as Erasmus and Montaigne, whose skeptical tolerance for ambiguity and diversity in knowledge accumulation seems more compatible with feminist thinking than with the rationalist universalism of the scientific revolution. Most feminists claim that knowledge is socially constructed, contingent, and shaped by context, culture, and history. According to Sandra Harding (1991:59), the subject of knowledge is never simply an individual capable of transcending historical location: in other words, there is no impartial, value-neutral Archimedean perspective. Feminist analysis insists that the inquirer be placed in the same critical plane as the subject matter (Harding, 1987:9). Even the best forms of knowledge cannot be divorced from their political consequences, a claim that can only appear unsettling to proponents of scientific methodologies who frequently label such knowledge claims as relativist and lacking in objectivity.

Feminists argue, however, that broadening the base from which knowledge is constructed, that is, including the experiences of women, can actually enhance objectivity.<sup>24</sup> Arguing from a modified standpoint position,<sup>25</sup> Sandra Harding explores the question as to whether objectivity and socially situated knowledge is an impossible combination. She concludes that adopting a feminist standpoint actually strengthens standards of objectivity. While it requires acknowledging that all human beliefs are socially situated, it also requires critical evaluation to determine which social situations tend to generate the most objective knowledge claims. Harding argues for what she calls “strong objectivity” which extends the task of scientific research to include a systematic examination of powerful background beliefs and making strange what has hitherto appeared as familiar (Harding, 1991:142, 149).

Likewise, Donna Haraway argues for what she calls “embodied objectivity” or “situated knowledge.” For Haraway, situated knowledge does not mean relativism but shared conversations leading to “better accounts of the world” (Haraway, 1988:580).<sup>26</sup> Indeed, feminists frequently use the metaphor of conversation both

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<sup>23</sup> Carol Cohn (1987) makes this point with respect to issues of nuclear strategy. She claims that the rationalist, depersonalized, and technocratic language of defense intellectuals has limited the kind of questions that can be asked and has restricted the kinds of policy options that are seen as legitimate.

<sup>24</sup> As Sandra Harding (1991:123) emphasizes, women’s experiences alone are not a reliable guide for deciding which knowledge claims are preferable because women tend to speak in socially acceptable ways. Nevertheless, Harding believes that women’s lives are the place from which feminist research should begin.

<sup>25</sup> I use the term *modified* to indicate that Harding takes into consideration postmodern critiques of an essentialized standpoint which, they say, speaks from the position of privileged Western women. Standpoint feminism comes out of Hegel’s notion of the master/slave relationship and out of Marxist theory more generally. Hegel and Marxists claim that the slave (or the proletariat) have, by necessity, a more comprehensive understanding of the position of both the master (or the capitalist) and the slave.

<sup>26</sup> Christine Sylvester’s method of empathetic cooperation draws on this idea of shared conversations (see Sylvester, 1994a, 1994b).

as a preferred methodology and in their calls for engagement with IR scholars. Since conversational or dialogic methodologies come out of a hermeneutic tradition, conversation is not a metaphor social scientists are likely to employ; indeed, it is one that would appear quite strange as a basis for theory construction.<sup>27</sup>

This brief overview of a variety of feminist epistemologies suggests that they are quite different from those prevailing in conventional international relations. Since all feminist approaches are concerned with social relations, particularly the investigation of the causes and consequences of unequal relationships between women and men, the questions they ask about international relations are likely to be quite different from those of international theorists primarily concerned with the interaction of states in the international system. While feminist theories might fit more comfortably into what Hollis and Smith (1990) term the “inside,” or hermeneutical approach, feminists construct their knowledge about international relations not so much from the perspectives of “insiders” but from voices of the disempowered and marginalized not previously heard.<sup>28</sup> The sounds of these unfamiliar voices and the issues they raise sometimes cause conventional scholars to question whether feminists even belong within the same discipline.

As Sandra Harding (1991:123) tells us, an important task of feminist theory is to make strange what has previously appeared familiar, or to challenge us to question what has hitherto appeared as “natural.” In international relations, this has involved an examination of the basic assumptions and concepts of the field, taken as unproblematic—and gender-neutral—by conventional international theorists. While critical approaches more generally have often been accused of indulging in criticism rather than producing new research programs (Walt, 1991:223), feminists would argue that a critical examination is necessary because feminist research agendas cannot be built without first exposing and questioning the gender biases of the field. As an example of one such conceptual reexamination and its implications for different kinds of investigations and understandings, I shall now outline some feminist perspectives on security. Rather than attempt to offer a comprehensive analysis of the subject, I use these observations to illustrate more concretely some of the sources of misunderstanding discussed above; this section is also intended to suggest potential feminist research agendas.<sup>29</sup>

### Feminist Perspectives on Security

I have chosen to focus on security because it has been central to the discipline of international relations since its inception in the early twentieth century. It is also an important issue for feminists who write about international relations. However, as I have indicated, since feminist perspectives are constructed out of very different ontologies and epistemologies, their definitions of security, explanations of insecurity, and prescriptions for security enhancement are areas where divergence from conventional international theory is significant. Thus, they offer a good illustration of some of the misunderstandings outlined above. I shall begin by defining what certain feminist scholars mean by security and insecurity; I shall outline some of the kinds of empirical evidence feminists use when analyzing security. Then, drawing on some of the feminist approaches discussed earlier, I will illustrate some of the

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<sup>27</sup> Tannen’s (1990:ch.3) distinction between “report-talk” and “rapport talk” may be relevant to this discussion of the gendering of scientific methods. According to Tannen, for most men, talk is a means of preserving independence, whereas, for most women, it is a way of establishing connections.

<sup>28</sup> It is important to stress that feminists recognize the multiplicity of women’s voices mediated by class, race, and cultural positions. Debate on the problems of essentialism is one of the most vital in feminist theory today. For an elaboration of the issues at stake see Martin, 1994.

<sup>29</sup> I have offered a more systematic analysis of security from a feminist perspective in *Gender in International Relations* (Tickner, 1992; see also Peterson, 1992a, and Peterson and Runyan, 1993).

types of explanations feminist theories offer for some contemporary insecurities, thereby demonstrating potential avenues for further research. While these research agendas may be different from conventional analyses of security, they too claim to seek greater understanding of “real-world” security issues.

*What Is Security?*

Scholars in the realist paradigm, within which much of the analysis of security has taken place, define security in political/military terms, as the protection of the boundaries and integrity of the state and its values against the dangers of a hostile international environment, Martin Wight’s “realm of necessity” (Wolfers, 1962). In their search for more parsimonious explanations, neorealists emphasize the anarchical structure of the system rather than domestic factors as being the primary determinant of states’ insecurities. States are postulated as unitary actors whose internal characteristics, beyond an assessment of their relative capabilities, are not seen as necessary for understanding their vulnerabilities or security-enhancing behavior (Waltz, 1979). States’ efforts to increase their power or engage in balance-of-power activities are explained as attempts to improve their security. In the United States, security studies, defined largely in terms of the bipolar nuclear confrontation between the United States and the former Soviet Union, became an important subfield within the discipline. For security specialists, this definition of security remains in place in the post–Cold War era. Security specialists believe that military power remains a central element of international politics and that the traditional agenda of security studies is, therefore, expanding rather than shrinking (Walt, 1991:222).

In the 1980s, a trend toward broadening the definition of security emerged as peace researchers, those concerned with poverty in the South, environmentalists, and certain European policy makers began to define security in economic and environmental as well as political/military terms (Independent Commission, 1982; Ullman, 1983; Mathews, 1989; Buzan, 1991). While this trend continues to gain strength after the end of the Cold War, the issue remains controversial.<sup>30</sup> It is, however, a definition, more compatible with most contemporary feminist scholarship that also finds traditional definitions of security too narrow for what they consider to be the security issues of the post–Cold War world. There are, however, important differences between the new security literature and feminist perspectives since very little of the new security literature has paid attention to women or gender.

Many IR feminists define security broadly in multidimensional and multilevel terms—as the diminution of all forms of violence, including physical, structural, and ecological (Tickner, 1992; Peterson and Runyan, 1993). Since women are marginal to the power structures of most states, and since feminist perspectives on security take women’s security as their central concern, most of these definitions start with the individual or community rather than the state or the international system. According to Christine Sylvester (1994b), security is elusive and partial and involves struggle and contention; it is a process rather than an ideal in which women must act as agents in the provision of their own security. Speaking from the margins, feminists are sensitive to the various ways in which social hierarchies manifest themselves across societies and history. Striving for security involves exposing these different social hierarchies, understanding how they construct and are constructed by the international order, and working to denaturalize and dismantle them.

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<sup>30</sup> Walt (1991) makes a case for continuing to define security narrowly. For a critique of Walt’s position see Kolodziej, 1992.



These feminist definitions of security grow out of the centrality of social relations, particularly gender relations, for feminist theorizing. Coming out of different literatures and working with definitions based on different ontologies as well as different normative goals, feminist writings on security open themselves up to criticism that their work does not fall within the subject matter of international relations. Feminists would respond by asserting that structural inequalities, which are central contributors to the insecurity of individuals, are built into the historical legacy of the modern state and the international system of which it is a part. Calling into question realist boundaries between anarchy and danger on the outside and order and security on the inside, feminists believe that state-centric or structural analyses miss the interrelation of insecurity across levels of analysis. Since “women’s space” inside households has also been beyond the reach of law in most states, feminists are often quite suspicious of boundaries that mark states as security providers. They would argue that Martin Wight’s political space, within which theorizing the good life is possible, requires radical restructuring before it can be regarded as offering a safe space for women.<sup>31</sup> I shall now outline some of the evidence feminists draw on when defining the kinds of personal and structural insecurities they believe must be overcome in order to create a more secure world.

Questioning the role of states as adequate security providers leads feminists to analyze power and military capabilities differently from conventional international relations scholars. Rather than seeing military capability as an assurance against outside threats to the state, militaries frequently are seen as antithetical to individuals’, particularly women’s, security—as winners in the competition for resources for social safety nets on which women depend disproportionately to men, as definers of an ideal type of militarized citizenship, usually denied to women (Tobias, 1990), or as legitimators of a kind of social order that can sometimes even valorize state violence.

Consequently, when analyzing political/military dimensions of security, feminists tend to focus on the consequences of what happens during wars rather than on their causes (Pettman, 1996:87–106). They draw on evidence to emphasize the negative impact of contemporary military conflicts on civilian populations. According to the United Nations’ *Human Development Report*, there has been a sharp increase in the proportion of civilian casualties of war—from about 10 percent at the beginning of the century to 90 percent today. While the *Report* does not break down these casualties by sex, it claims that this makes women among the worst sufferers even though they constitute only 2 percent of the world’s regular army personnel (United Nations, 1995:45). As mothers, family providers, and care-givers, women are particularly penalized by economic sanctions associated with military conflict, such as the UN boycott put in place against Iraq after the Gulf War. Women and children (about 18 million at the end of 1993) constitute about 80 percent of the total refugee population, a population whose numbers increased from 3 million to 27 million between 1970 and 1994, mainly due to military conflict (United Nations, 1995:14).<sup>32</sup> Feminists also draw attention to issues of rape in war; as illustrated by the Bosnian

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<sup>31</sup> I am aware that women’s relations to the state vary across race, class, and culture. I am also aware that the state may not be a safe space for men in racially or ethnically divided societies. Mona Harrington (1992) has offered an interesting challenge to feminists’ often negative views of the state. Harrington argues for a reformulated “feminist” state which could provide the necessary protection against global capitalism and international institutions which, she argues, increasingly, have no democratic accountability. This challenge seems to have saliency in an era of “globalization” and its negative effects on marginalized populations documented by the *Human Development Report* (United Nations, 1995). I cite the 1995 edition because it focused specifically on women and gender issues. The UN’s recent disaggregation of data by sex has significantly advanced the potential for research on women worldwide.

<sup>32</sup> Although the majority of refugees in camps are women left alone to care for children and, therefore, acting as heads of households, they usually do not have refugee status in their own right but only as wives within families (Moser, 1991:96).

case, rape is not just an accident of war but is, or can be, a systematic military strategy. Cynthia Enloe (1993:119) has described social structures in place around most army bases where women are often kidnapped and sold into prostitution.

For feminists writing about security, economic dimensions and issues of structural violence have been as important as issues of military conflict.<sup>33</sup> According to the *Human Development Report*, in no country are women doing as well as men. While figures vary from state to state, on an average, women earn three quarters of men's earnings. Of the 1.3 billion people estimated to be in poverty today, 70 percent are women: the number of rural women living in absolute poverty rose by nearly 50 percent over the past two decades (United Nations, 1995:36). Women receive a disproportionately small share of credit from formal banking institutions. For example, in Latin America, women constitute only 7–11 percent of the beneficiaries of credit programs; while women in Africa contribute up to 80 percent of total food production, they receive less than 10 percent of the credit to small farmers and 1 percent of total credit to agriculture (United Nations, 1995:4, 39). While women actually work more hours than men in almost all societies, their work is under-remunerated and undervalued because much of it takes place outside the market economy, in households or subsistence sectors. Whether women are gatherers of fuel and firewood or mothers of sick children, their lives are severely impacted by resource shortages and environmental pollution.

These are some of the issues with which feminists writing about security, defined in both political/military and economic terms, are concerned. They are not, however, issues considered relevant to conventional state-centric security concerns. Challenging both the traditional notion of the state as the framework within which security should be defined and analyzed, and the conventional boundaries between security inside and anarchy outside the state, feminists embed their analyses in a system of relations that cross these boundaries. Challenging the notion of discrete levels of analysis, they argue that inequalities between women and men, inequalities that contribute to all forms of insecurity, can only be understood and explained within the framework of a system shaped by patriarchal structures that extend from the household to the global economy. I shall now elaborate on some of the ways feminists explain these persistent inequalities.

#### *Explaining Insecurity*

Feminists claim that inequalities, which decrease individuals', particularly women's, security, cannot be understood using conventional tools of analysis. Theories that construct structural explanations that aspire to universality typically fail to recognize how unequal social structures impact in different ways on the security of different groups. Feminists believe that only by introducing gender as a category of analysis can the differential impact of the state system and the global economy on the lives of women and men be analyzed and understood. Feminists also caution that searching for universal laws may miss the ways in which gender hierarchies manifest themselves in a variety of ways across time and culture; therefore, theories must be sensitive to history, context, and contingency.

Questioning the neutrality of facts and concepts, feminists have challenged international theory's claim that the state can be taken as given in its theoretical investigations. Feminists assert that only by analyzing the evolution of the modern state system and its changing political, economic, and social structures can we begin to understand its limitations as a security provider. The particular insecurities of

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<sup>33</sup> The term *structural violence* was first introduced by Johan Galtung in the 1970s to explain decreased life expectancy of individuals due to structures that cause economic deprivation (see Galtung, 1971).

women cannot be understood without reference to historical divisions between public and private spheres. As Spike Peterson and other feminists have pointed out, at the time of the foundation of the modern Western state, and coincidentally with the beginnings of capitalism, women were not included as citizens but consigned to the private space of the household; thus, they were removed both from the public sphere of politics and the economic sphere of production (Peterson, 1992a:40–4). As a result, women lost much of their existing autonomy and agency, becoming more dependent on men for their economic security.

Consequently, the term *citizen* has also been problematic for women. As Carole Pateman (1988) has pointed out, women were not included in the original social contract by most contract theorists in the Western tradition; rather, they were generally subsumed under male heads of households with no legal rights of their own. In most parts of the world women are still struggling for full equality. Gaining the right to vote much later than men in most societies,<sup>34</sup> women continue to be under-represented in positions of political and economic power and are usually excluded from military combat even in societies committed to formal equality. Therefore, terms such as *citizen*, *head of household*, and *breadwinner* are not neutral but are associated with men. In spite of the fact that many women do work outside the household, the association of women with housewife, care-giver, and mother has become naturalized, thereby decreasing women's economic security and autonomy. While these issues may appear irrelevant to the conduct of international politics, feminists claim that these gender-differentiated roles actually support and legitimate the international security-seeking behavior of the state.

For example, feminists have argued that unequal gender relations are important for sustaining the military activities of the state. Thus, what goes on in wars is not irrelevant to their causes and outcomes. The notion that (young) males fight wars to protect vulnerable groups such as women and children who cannot be expected to protect themselves has been an important motivator for the recruitment of military forces and support for wars. Feminists have challenged this protector/protected relationship with evidence of the high increase in civilian casualties documented above.<sup>35</sup> As feminists have pointed out, if women are thought to be in need of protection, it is often their protectors who provide the greatest threat. Judith Stiehm (1982) claims that this dependent, asymmetric relationship leads to feelings of low self-esteem and little sense of responsibility on the part of women. For men, the presence of able-bodied, competent adults who are seen as dependent and incapable can contribute to misogyny. Anne Orford (1996) tells us that accounts of sexual assault by peacekeepers have emerged in many UN peacekeeping operations. However, such violence against women is usually dismissed as a "natural" outcome of the right of young soldiers to enjoy themselves. This type of behavior may also be aggravated by the misogynist training of soldiers who are taught to fight and kill through appeals to their masculinity; such behavior further erodes the notion of protection.

Whereas feminist analysis of military security has focused on the gendered structures of state institutions, issues of economic security and insecurity have emphasized the interrelationship between activities in markets and households. Feminists claim that women's particular economic insecurities can only be understood in the context of patriarchal structures, mediated through race, class, and ethnicity, which have the effect of consigning women to households or low-paying

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<sup>34</sup> The suffrage has still not been extended to women in all societies. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are states where women are still denied the vote, an issue that did not receive much attention when the rationale of fighting for democracy was used to justify the Gulf War to the American public.

<sup>35</sup> For an extensive analysis of women's relationship to war throughout history see Elshtain, 1987.

jobs. Public/private boundaries have the effect of naturalizing women's unremunerated work in the home to the detriment of women's autonomy and economic security. Women's disproportionate numbers at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale cannot be explained by market conditions alone; they also require an understanding that certain types of work such as teaching, nursing, and other forms of care-giving are often considered "natural" for women to perform (Peterson and Runyan, 1993:37; Pettman, 1996:165–8). Moreover, the clustering of women in low-paying or non-waged work in subsistence or households cannot be understood by using rational choice models, because women may have internalized the ideas behind traditional systems of discrimination, and thus may themselves view their roles as natural (Nussbaum and Glover, 1995:91). In other words, social expectations having to do with gender roles can reinforce economic inequalities between women and men and exacerbate women's insecurities. Such issues can only be explained by using gender as a category of analysis; since they take them as given, rational actor models miss the extent to which opportunities and choices are constrained by the social relations in which they are embedded.

Many of these issues seem far removed from the concerns of international relations. But, employing bottom-up rather than top-down explanations, feminists claim that the operation of the global economy and states' attempts to secure benefits from it are built on these unequal social relations between women and men which work to the detriment of women's (and certain men's) security. For example, states that successfully compete in attracting multinational corporations often do so by promising them a pool of docile cheap labor consisting of young unmarried women who are not seen as "breadwinners" and who are unlikely to organize to protest working conditions and low wages (Enloe, 1990:151–76). When states are forced to cut back on government spending in order to comply with structural adjustment programs, it is often the expectation that women, by virtue of their traditional role as care-givers, will perform the welfare tasks previously assumed by the state without remuneration. According to Caroline Moser (1991:105), structural adjustment programs dedicated to economic "efficiency" are built on the assumption of the elasticity of women's unpaid labor.

In presenting some feminist perspectives on security and some explanations for insecurity, I have demonstrated how feminists are challenging levels of analysis and boundaries between inside and outside which they see, not as discrete constructs delineating boundaries between anarchy and order, but as contested and mutually constitutive of one another. Through a reexamination of the state, feminists demonstrate how the unequal social relations on which most states are founded both influence their external security-seeking behavior and are influenced by it. Investigating states as gendered constructs is not irrelevant to understanding their security-seeking behaviors as well as whose interests are most served by these behaviors. Bringing to light social structures that support war and "naturalize" the gender inequalities manifested in markets and households is not irrelevant for understanding their causes. Feminists claim that the gendered foundations of states and markets must be exposed and challenged before adequate understandings of, and prescriptions for, women's (and certain men's) security broadly defined can be formulated.

### **Conclusions**

Feminist theorists have rarely achieved the serious engagement with other IR scholars for which they have frequently called. When they have occurred, conversations have often led to misunderstandings and other kinds of miscommunication, such as awkward silences and feminist resistances to suggestions for incorporation into more mainstream approaches. In this article I have tried to reconstruct some

typical conversational encounters and to offer some hypotheses as to why estrangement seems so often to be the result. Although I realize that these encounters demonstrate misunderstandings on both sides, I have emphasized some feminist perspectives because they are less likely to be familiar to IR scholars. While it is all too easy to account for these troubled engagements between IR scholars and feminists solely in terms of differences in ontologies and epistemologies, it must be acknowledged that power differences play an important role also. Inequalities in power between mainstream and feminist IR allow for greater ignorance of feminist approaches on the part of the mainstream than is possible for feminists with respect to conventional IR, if they are to be accorded any legitimacy within the profession. Because of this power differential, feminists are suspicious of cooptation or attempts to label certain of their approaches as more compatible than others.

Understanding that all these problems are inherent in calling for one more effort at renewed conversation, I have tried to suggest and analyze reasons for the frequent failures or avoidance of such efforts, comparing these failures to problems of cross-cultural communications. Lack of understanding and judgments of irrelevance are two major causes of the silence with which feminist approaches have generally been received by the discipline of international relations. Contemporary feminist perspectives on international relations are based on ontologies and epistemologies that are quite different from those that inform the conventional discipline. Since they grow out of ontologies that take individuals or groups embedded in and changed by social relations, such relationally defined feminist approaches do not fit comfortably within conventional levels of analysis theorizing or the state-centric and structural approaches which grow out of such theorizing. They are also informed by different normative concerns. Moreover, feminists claim that normative international theories, such as the Grotian and Kantian traditions, are based on literatures that have often diminished or excluded women.

Feminist epistemologies that inform these new ways of understanding international relations are also quite different from those of conventional international theory. But, as I have argued, feminists cannot be anything but skeptical of universal truth claims and explanations associated with a body of knowledge from which women have frequently been excluded as knowers and subjects. However, this does not mean that feminists are abandoning theory or the search for better knowledge. Although they draw on epistemologies quite different from conventional international relations, they also are seeking better understanding of the processes that inform international political, economic, and social relations. Building knowledge that does not start from the position of the detached universal subject involves being sensitive to difference while striving to be as objective as possible. By starting thought from women's lives, feminists claim they are actually broadening the base from which knowledge is constructed. While feminist perspectives do not claim to tell us everything we need to know about the behavior of states or the workings of the global economy, they are telling us things that have too often remained invisible.

Feminists often draw on the notion of conversation when pursuing their goal of shareable understandings of the world. Skeptical of the possibility of arriving at one universal truth, they advocate seeking understanding through dialogues across boundaries and cultures in which the voices of others, particularly those on the margins, must be seen as equally valid as one's own.<sup>36</sup> This method of truth-seeking, motivated by the attempt to separate valid knowledge from what feminists see as power-induced distortions, is far removed from more scientific methodologies and from a discipline whose original goal was to better understand the behavior of states

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<sup>36</sup> Jef Huysmans (1995:486) suggests that this dialogic approach, typical of late-modern or postmodern approaches to IR, is inspired by the liberal idea of pluralism and a democratic ethos.

in order to offer advice to their policy makers. Therefore, feminists must understand that their preferred methodologies and the issues they raise are alien to the traditional discipline; and IR scholars must realize that speaking from the perspective of the disempowered appears increasingly urgent in a world where the marginalized are the most likely victims of war and the negative effects of economic globalization.

Seeking greater understanding across theoretical divides, and the scientific and political cultures that sustain them, might be the best model if feminist international theory is to have a future within the discipline. Feminist theorists may claim that conventional IR has little to offer as to how to make cross-paradigm communications more effective and mutually successful. But feminists must understand that methodologies relevant to the investigations of their preferred issues are not normally part of a graduate curriculum in IR in the United States; therefore, they appear strange, unfamiliar, and often irrelevant to those so trained. However, feminists, along with other critical scholars, are pioneering the effort to look beyond conventional training and investigate the relevance of other disciplines and literatures for these methodologies. Conversations will not be successful until the legitimacy of these endeavors is more widely recognized and acknowledged as part of the discipline of international relations.

Asking the question as to how we open lines of communication, Deborah Tannen (1990:120–1) suggests that men and women must try to take each other on their own terms rather than apply the standards of one group to the behavior of the other. Additionally, she claims that this is not an easy task because all of us tend to look for a single “right” way of doing things. Could this be a model for beginning more productive conversations between feminists and IR theorists?

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