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**YOU JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND:
TROUBLED ENGAGEMENTS BETWEEN
FEMINISTS AND IR THEORISTS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper 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 which inform the conventional discipline. Therefore, they do not fit comfortably within conventional state-centric and structural approaches to IR theorising, or with the methodologies usually employed by IR scholars. As an illustration of how these differences can cause misunderstandings, the paper offers some feminist perspectives on security, a concept central to the discipline. It also demonstrates how feminist approaches offer some new ways to understand contemporary security problems. In conclusion, it suggests how feminist/IR engagements might be more constructively pursued.

YOU JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND: TROUBLED ENGAGEMENTS BETWEEN FEMINISTS AND IR THEORISTS

*J. Ann Tickner**

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.¹ 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).² While feminist scholars frequently call for conversations and dialogue across paradigms (Peterson, 1992b: 184), few public conversations or debates have occurred.³ 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 paper is taken, asserts that everyday conversations between women and men are cross-

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1 In defining this literature as new, I am referring to recent work which is critiquing international relations theory from a feminist perspective and reconstructing international relations through gender-sensitive lenses. For some examples see Grant and Newland eds. (1991); Peterson, ed. (1992a); Pettman (1996); Sylvester (1994b); and Tickner (1992). Of course, I am aware of the impossibility, and undesireability, of trying to represent a very rich and diverse literature in one paper.

2 Certain introductory IR texts have begun to incorporate feminist approaches: see Goldstein (1994) and Rourke (1993). A mainstream scholar who has engaged with feminism is Keohane (1989). As yet, feminist articles in mainstream journals in the United States have been rare. Outside the US the situation is somewhat better. See Pettman (1993) and Zalewski (1995).

3 The article from which the definition of the third debate is taken (Lapid, 1989) contains no reference to feminist perspectives. Subsequent edited volumes, representing critical perspectives, have included work by feminists (Lapid and Kratochwil eds., 1996; Booth and Smith eds., 1995); nevertheless, the level of critical engagement has been low. With respect to the mainstream, there has been some recognition of post-positivist approaches other than feminism; however, they have often been dismissed or assessed quite negatively. See for examples, Walt (1991) and Gilpin (in Keohane, 1986). For a more constructive engagement see Keohane (1988) and the response by Walker (1989). The present paper is focused on problems of critical engagement with mainstream rather than with other post-positivist approaches.

cultural and fraught with all the misunderstandings and talking at cross purposes that cross-cultural communications frequently incur (Tannen, 1990).⁴ Could it be that the lack of sustained dialogue or substantively focused debates between feminists and scholars of international relations demonstrate a reluctance to engage in similarly difficult cross-cultural conversations evidenced in the very different realities and epistemologies with which feminists and international relations scholars are working?

Although critical engagement is rare, evidence of these awkward silences and miscommunications can be found in the oral questions and comments which IR-trained feminists frequently encounter when presenting their work to IR audiences. Having articulated what seems to her to be a reasoned 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 issues of her presentation. Questioners may claim that her presentation has little to do with the discipline of international relations or the practice of international politics.⁵ Prefaced by affirmations that the material presented is genuinely interesting and important, the following issues are frequently raised: What does this talk have to do with solving 'real-world' problems such as Bosnia, Northern Ireland or nuclear proliferation?⁶ What does gender have to do with explaining the behaviour of states in the international system?

In fact, to scholars trained in positivist methodologies, feminist approaches may not look like theory at all—merely criticism, devoid of any potential for fruitful research programs. Therefore, they ask, can't women just as well be subsumed under established theoretical approaches? Assuming that the assertion that women are more peaceful than men lurks somewhere behind the presenter's remarks, a questioner may challenge this claim by referring to Margaret Thatcher or Golda

4 While *You Just Don't Understand* is a popular rather than a scholarly book, it comes out of a rich tradition of gender-sensitive discourse analysis many of whose classics are cited in Tannen's bibliography.

5 I am drawing on experiences (by now fairly well substantiated) that I and other feminist scholars have had when speaking to IR audiences. As Tannen (1990) notes of her own experience in oral presentations, it is quite remarkable how many of the questioners are men even in an audience in which women are the majority and women's issues are the focus of the discussion. Speaking to non-IR feminists can also be an exercise in miscommunication but for different reasons. Disappointingly, I have found that, to scholars outside the discipline, IR frequently appears esoteric with little relevance to their lives or intellectual interests.

6 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. As I will argue below, I believe that it is the result of a much deeper level of misunderstanding.

Meier. 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.

It is my belief that these often unsatisfactory engagements may themselves be illustrations of a gendered dialogue that inhibits more sustained conversations between feminists and international relations scholars.⁷ But they may also be a useful entry point for overcoming these silences and beginning more constructive dialogues. In this paper, I will draw on the implications and apparent pre-suppositions of some of these questions to demonstrate that feminists and more traditional IR scholars are drawing on very different realities and using different epistemologies when they engage in theorising about international relations. It is my belief that these differences are gendered with all the difficulties of cross-cultural communication that this implies.

In the first part of the paper, I will address three issues embodied in these questions which, I believe, frequently cause miscommunication and awkward silences; first, misunderstandings over the meaning of gender; second, the different realities or ontologies that feminists and non-feminists writing about international relations see when they theorise the international; third, the extension of this analysis to epistemological divides. In the second part of the paper, I offer some feminist perspectives on security to illustrate how these differences can cause misunderstanding when feminists engage in writing about international relations. I shall also take up the challenge of how feminist perspectives can contribute new ways to understand contemporary security problems. In conclusion, I offer some thoughts on how these feminist/non-feminist IR engagements might be more constructively pursued.

Sources of misunderstanding

Gender

Responding to a call to change the name of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters to include a recognition of its 30 per cent female membership, James Hoffa asserted that the name should remain because 'the definition of brotherhood is that it's neutral' (*New York Times*, 17 July 1996, A10). 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

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I am not saying that this is a conversation that pits men against women. A majority of IR women scholars do not work with feminist epistemologies and some men do take seriously, and work with, gender as a category of analysis. Nevertheless, I do believe that these theoretical divides display manifestations of socially constructed gender differences which I will define below.

masculinist assumptions which can naturalise or hide gender differences and gender inequalities. When feminists challenge these assumptions, it can often appear threatening, or even be seen as 'male-bashing', whether or not it is intended, even amongst the most sophisticated audiences.⁸ Deborah Tannen has suggested that the reason that gender differences are more troubling than other cross-cultural differences is that they occur where the home and hearth are; 'we enact and create our gender, and our inequality, with every move that we make' (Tannen, 1990: 283). The fact that all contemporary feminisms take gender as their central category of analysis, and that the meaning of gender, which embodies relationships of power inequality, is so often misunderstood, are, I believe, central to problems of misunderstandings and miscommunications.⁹

Feminists define gender as a set of variable but socially and culturally constructed characteristics—such as power, autonomy, rationality and public—which are stereotypically associated with masculinity while their opposites—weakness, dependence, emotion and private—are associated with femininity. Importantly, these characteristics 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.¹⁰ 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 behaviour is necessary for both women and men to succeed in the tough world of international politics.¹¹

As Joan Scott claims (1986: 1069), while the forms gender relations take across different cultures may vary, they are almost always unequal; therefore, gender labelling 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, Scott argues that it is constructed in the economy and the

⁸ 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 (1989:10-13) for elaboration of this point.

⁹ Although gender is not just about women, it is usually women and feminists who analyse and 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 human or even invisible by this move. Recent revelations of the gender biases of medical research are an important illustration of this.

¹⁰ Psychological tests have demonstrated that both women and men assign a more positive value to masculine characteristics (Broverman et.al.,1972). Feminists have noted that masculine characteristics are often used when prescribing what is deemed appropriate behaviour for states in the international system. See Tickner (1992:ch.2).

¹¹ Almost all feminists writing about international relations use gender in this social constructionist sense, a move that many of them see as opening avenues for communication by avoiding some of the threatened responses illustrated above. However, Marysia Zalewski raises the interesting question that, as compared with men, women kill remarkably few people, a fact about which she believes we should be more curious (Zalewski, 1995:349).

polity through various institutional structures that have the effect of 'naturalising' and even legalising women's inferior status.¹² According to Jane Flax (1987: 624), 'gender relations enter into and are constituent elements in every aspect of human experience'. She 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 emphasised if scholars of international relations are to appreciate 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.

Theorising the international

In his famous piece, 'Why is There No International Theory?' Martin Wight remarked on the absence of an international theoretical tradition comparable to the very rich historical tradition of western political philosophy (Der Derian, 1995: 15–35).¹³ According to Wight, the reason for this absence can be found in the character of the international system. Theorising 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' characterised by 'recurrence and repetition', Wight claimed that there could be no 'progressive' international theory, only a 'theory of survival' marked by 'an intellectual and moral poverty' (Der Derian, 1995: 32).¹⁴ Wight is, of course, using theory in a normative sense, not fashionable amongst contemporary, more 'scientific' theoretical approaches. He is postulating a 'theory of the good life', (Der Derian, 1995: 32) a progressive theory of social relations which calls for societal improvements, improvements which, Wight claims, can only take place 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

12 Recent feminist writings which deal with issues of race and class problematise these power relationships still further. As bell hooks (1984) claims, non-white 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 analysing gender and women's oppression. However, I do not believe that this should prevent us from making testable, generaliseable claims about the gendering of the discipline of international relations. For a useful discussion of this issue more generally see Martin (1994).

13 It is interesting to note that many post-positivist critics of IR theory ground their critiques in political philosophy. 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 contemporary post-positivist perspectives.

14 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).

that has generally either excluded women altogether or treated them as less than fully human (Okin, 1980),¹⁵ his reasons for the poverty of international theory have relevance for problems feminists encounter when theorising 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 (Whitworth, 1989) grounded as they are in an epistemology which takes social relations as its central category of analysis. As demonstrated above, 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 decontextualised unitary states and anarchical international structures. They investigate how military conflict or the behaviour of states in the international system are constructed through or embedded in unequal gender relations and how they affect the life chances of individuals, particularly women. Since international relations theory has generally shied away from what is considered reductionist level one analysis, these very different foci cause misunderstandings 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 theorising about the international system in approaches that start with different assumptions? Given the increase in interdependence, the growth of transnational non-state actors and the proliferation of international institutions, many IR scholars, particularly those outside the realist tradition, have postulated, not an anarchy, but an international society of states within which a discussion of social relations becomes possible (Bull, 1977). Writing in this tradition, Andrew Linklater (1982) offers a Kantian critique of Wight.¹⁶ While acknowledging the tension between man as a universal category and citizens bound by loyalties to their states,¹⁷ Linklater postulates a Kantian resolution:

¹⁵ 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 in Grant and Newland (1991) and Sylvester (1994a).

¹⁶ A contemporary version of the Kantian position, which is popular in US scholarship today, is the 'democratic peace' literature. For one such example see Russett (1993).

¹⁷ Linklater's use of the term 'man' is rather jarring in times committed to gender inclusive language. However, as I shall argue below, the term is actually quite appropriate for a philosophical tradition which, for the most part, has excluded women. This is not to say that Linklater would support the explicitly sexist assumptions of classical political theory.

...because 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 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 assigned by international relations scholars.¹⁸ However, 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 and Cornell, 1987: 81). Most western political theorists were quite explicit in their claims that women were either 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).¹⁹

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,

¹⁸ Feminists believe that the assignation of 'idealism' to their work is often mistaken. They claim that 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 which 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 also been absent from international law from which the cosmopolitan and communitarian traditions have drawn inspiration: see Charlesworth et.al. (1991).

¹⁹ 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 today. For positions on both sides of this debate see various chapters in Nussbaum and Glover (1995).

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 which have served as foundational texts for international relations must be re-examined for evidence of gender biases which call into question the gender neutrality frequently claimed for the discipline. In the words of one feminist theorist, '[A]ll forms of feminist theorising 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 are bound to result in miscommunications and make conversations with international theorists, trained in positivist methodologies, difficult.

Epistemological divides

International theory. In his commentary on Wight's piece, discussed earlier, Hans Morgenthau (Der Derian, 1995: 36–52) asserted that international theory could be progressive but in rather a different sense:

...the 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 affairs (Der Derian, 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' (Der Derian, 1995: 46). Unlike Wight, Morgenthau was making the case for a positivist, 'value-free' international theory, a type of theory which has captured mainstream international relations, at least in the United States.²⁰

As I shall discuss below, this definition of theory is one which feminists have found problematic. Nevertheless, feminists often misunderstand the rationale for the search for more 'scientific' theories 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. The flagrant violation of international law and abuse of human rights in the name of German nationalism motivated Morgenthau, and other early realists, to dissociate the realm of morality

²⁰ Just as he was not considered scientific enough by many subsequent positivist 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 US, see Hoffmann (1977).

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 reoccur in the future.²¹ 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 a very different audience from feminist international relations, an issue to which I shall return below because, I believe, it is one which also causes misunderstandings.

The positivist turn in post-war realism was later adopted by behaviouralists, peace researchers, neorealists and liberal institutionalists all of whom began to draw on models from the natural sciences and 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 tendencies, this time of post-war Communism. Theories were defined as sets of logically related causal propositions to be tested through the Popperian notion of falsification. Scientific research programs were employed with realist assumptions about the international system serving as the 'hard core' (Lakatos and Musgrave, 1970). While international theory never sought the precision of Newton's grand schemes of deterministic laws and inescapable forces, it did claim that the international system is more than the constant and regular behaviour of its parts (Hollis and Smith, 1990: 50). Structural theories, popular in the discipline, account for behaviour by searching for causes because, these theorists believe, events are governed by the laws of nature; in other words, behaviour is generated by structures external to the actors themselves (Hollis and Smith, 1990: 3).²² In all these endeavours, theorists have generally assumed the possibility as well as the desirability of conducting systematic scientific research which can rise above the 'political' (Walt, 1991: 221).

²¹ For a feminist critique of Morgenthau's six principles of political realism see Tickner (1988).

²² Hollis and Smith (1990) identify two traditions in international theory, 'inside' and 'outside'. Since 'inside' theories are interpretative 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.

Borrowing from economics, approaches such as game theory and rational choice theory became popular tools for explaining the consequences of the optimising behaviour of self-interested states in an anarchical international system as well as the 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).²³ The search for systematic inquiry could, hopefully, contribute to the effort of diminishing the likelihood of future conflict.

Feminist theory. Since it entered the field of international relations in the late 1980s, feminist theory has often been located within the critical voices of the 'third debate', a term articulated by Yosef Lapid in 1989 (Peterson, 1992b:185). In an article outlining the potential contributions of post-positivist approaches, Lapid noted that, while they came out of very different philosophical traditions, they were united in challenging the assumptions of more conventional theory. Post-positivists question the use of scientific models and the notion of objectivity and truth associated with these models.²⁴ The task for post-positivists, according to Lapid, is 'neither the discovery of some ahistorical and universal scientific method nor the attainment of some objectively validated truth about world politics. It is rather a matter of promoting a more reflexive intellectual environment in which debate, criticism, and novelty can freely circulate' (Lapid, 1989: 250).

Feminists working in international relations would agree with these challenges and goals. Although they are not all post-modern, or even post-Enlightenment, in their normative orientation at least, many contemporary feminist international relations scholars are post-positivists. Agreeing with Robert Cox's assertion that theory is always for someone and for some purpose, their goal 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).²⁵ In the words of Spike

23 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).

24 It should be noted that more conventional theorists have also recognised and debated the problems of applying natural science methods to the social sciences. I am indebted to Harvey Starr for this observation.

25 Cox contrasts this with conventional theory which he labels 'problem solving'. This type of theory 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 characterised by gender hierarchies that are detrimental to women, they would be unlikely to take such an epistemological stance. It is interesting to note that Tannen (1990:ch.2) associates men with problem-solving conversations.

Peterson, 'post positivism compels our attention to context and historical process, to contingency and uncertainty, to how we construct, rather than discover, our world(s)' (Peterson, 1992a: 57).

In developing their critiques of international theory, feminists, like other post-positivists, draw on rich and varied philosophical traditions and literatures outside international relations and political science within which most IR scholars are trained. While IR feminists are seeking genuine knowledge which 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 other post-positivists, have gone outside the discipline to seek more appropriate methodologies. This deepens the level of misunderstanding.

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:²⁶ 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 socialisation practices of early childhood, radicals, Marxists and socialists look for explanations in structures of patriarchy or in the labour market with its gender discriminations and divisions between public (paid) and private (unpaid/domestic) work. But, as Carole Pateman has emphasised, 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 (Pateman, 1994: 21).

All these feminist theoretical approaches are grounded in social and political theory and sociological traditions which have not been central to 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 positivist social science methodologies equally difficult because of the lack of agreement on what counts as legitimate scientific inquiry. Since all these post-positivist feminist approaches deny the claim that women can simply be added to existing theoretical frameworks, it is predictable that misunderstandings will compound when it is suggested that feminist approaches could be incorporated into conventional IR methodologies. Indeed, feminists have a legitimate fear of cooptation; so often

²⁶ 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. As Sylvester has remarked, 'feminist standpoint and postmodernist epistemologies are borders to each other, but they also ooze and leak' (1994a:325). The interdisciplinarity of feminisms compounds the difficulties and limitations of categorisations. For a useful introductory overview of feminist theories see Tong (1989).

women's knowledge has been forgotten or subsumed under more dominant discourses.²⁷

This can also be a source of misunderstanding when international theorists attempt to make women more visible in their texts. For, as diplomatic historian 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 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.

What these feminists are telling us is that we must go beyond traditional knowledge frameworks, such as the way we construct international theory without any attention to gender, and search deeper to find the ways in which gender hierarchies serve to reinforce socially constructed institutions and practices which perpetuate differing and unequal role expectations, expectations which have contributed to fundamental inequalities between women and men in the world of international politics. In other words, gender must be considered a central category of analysis: 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, discussed earlier, that this type of knowledge is gendered. Such assertions are particularly unsettling for scholars trained in positivist methodologies. 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,

²⁷ One of the issues that Weber's (1994) critique of Keohane (1989) deals with is the issue of cooptation.

challenging the priority of 'man' in the modern episteme must be fundamental to any feminist program (Heckman, 1990:2).

In her critique of the natural sciences, Evelyn Fox Keller claims 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 (Keller, 1985: 89). 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). This separation 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 which has been particularly evident in theories of international relations.²⁸ 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.²⁹

Most feminists claim that knowledge is socially constructed, contingent and shaped by context, culture and history. According to Sandra Harding, 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 (Harding, 1991: 59), like that embodied in depersonalised approaches such as structural realism. Feminist analysis insists that the inquirer be placed in the same

²⁸ 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 structure of capitalism. Stephen Toulmin (1990) analyses the coincidence of the birth of the scientific method and the birth of the modern nation-state. He claims that, as the position of the family became defined by its male members so sexism became constitutive of the modern state. Toulmin writes of a 'pre-modern' or 'early-modern' humanistic tradition, incorporating writers such as Erasmus and Montaigne, whose sceptical tolerance for ambiguity and diversity in knowledge accumulation seem more compatible with feminist thinking than with the rationalist universalism of the scientific revolution. Both Pateman's and Toulmin's characterisations of the seventeenth century are quite compatible with feminist claims that eras labelled 'progressive' are not always so for women.

²⁹ Carol Cohn (1987) makes this point with respect to issues of nuclear strategy. She claims that the rationalist, depersonalised and technocratic language of defence intellectuals has limited the kinds of questions that can be asked and restricted the kinds of policy options that are seen as legitimate.

critical plane as the subject matter (Harding, 1987: 9). Even the best forms of knowledge cannot be divorced from their political consequences. Therefore, the rigid separation of theory and practice, or fact and value, is illusory: Walt's (1991: 221) preference for rising above the political is considered an impossibility, a claim that can only appear unsettling to proponents of positivist 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.³⁰ Arguing from a modified standpoint position,³¹ 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 rather, shared conversations leading to 'better accounts of the world' (Haraway, 1988: 580).³² It is instructive to note how often feminists use the metaphor of conversation both as a methodology for constructing their theoretical frameworks and in their calls for engagement with IR scholars. Since conversational methodologies come out of a hermeneutic tradition, it is not a metaphor which positivists are likely to employ; indeed, it is one which would appear quite strange as a method for theory construction.³³

30 As Sandra Harding emphasises, 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 (Harding, 1991:123).

31 I use the term 'modified' to indicate that Harding takes into consideration post-modern critiques of an essentialised 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.

32 Christine Sylvester's method of empathetic cooperation draws on this idea of shared conversations: see Sylvester (1994a and b).

33 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.

This brief overview of feminist epistemologies suggests that they are quite different from those prevailing in mainstream 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 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 marginalised not previously heard.³⁴ The sounds of these unfamiliar voices and issues which they raise sometimes cause conventional scholars to question whether feminists belong within the same discipline.

As Sandra Harding 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' (Harding, 1991: 123). 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 post-positivist approaches more generally have often been accused of indulging in criticism rather than producing new research programs (Walt, 1991: 223),³⁵ feminists would argue that this critical examination of the gender biases of the discipline 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.

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

³⁴ It is important to stress that feminists recognise 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).

³⁵ In this piece, Walt warns of 'counterproductive tangents', such as the post-modern approach to international affairs which produces works of criticism rather than theory. He claims that issues of war and peace are too important for the field to be diverted by self-indulgent discourse that is divorced from the real world. While Walt, like most conventional scholars, does not cite any feminists, if he did so, his charges would probably be similar.

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; then, drawing on some of the feminist theories discussed earlier, I will offer some explanations for some contemporary insecurities. I hope thereby to suggest that feminists go beyond critique and offer some new ways of understanding some 'real-world' 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, neo-realists emphasise 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 behaviour (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 sub-field within the IR 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).

Feminists find this definition of security too narrow for what they consider to be the security issues of the post-Cold War world.³⁶ Feminists define security more broadly in multidimensional and multilevel terms as the diminution of all forms of violence, including physical, structural and ecological (Peterson and Runyan, 1993; Tickner, 1992).³⁷ Since women are marginal to the power structures of most states

³⁶ For a more general critique of Walt's definition of security studies, which also finds it too narrow and ethnocentric, see Kolodziej (1992).

³⁷ Although informed by rather different theoretical underpinnings, these definitions are closer to the various attempts, that began in the 1980s, to broaden the definition of security to include economic and environmental issues (Ullman, 1983; Mathews, 1989; Buzan, 1991). These redefinitions have been controversial, however, and have been assessed quite negatively by traditional security specialists (Walt, 1991).

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.

Feminists are suspicious of universal schemes for perpetual peace given their scepticism about false universalisms based on the knowledge and experience of men. Although feminists are frequently told that they are implying that women are more peaceful than men, many are actually quite suspicious of the association of women with peace. Besides being derivative of an essentialised position about women's 'nature', to which many contemporary feminists do not subscribe, this association tends to brand women as naive and unrealistic thereby further delegitimising their voices in the world of foreign policymaking (Sylvester, 1987). Speaking from the margins, feminists are sensitive to the various ways that 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 denaturalise and dismantle them.

These feminist definitions of security grow out of the centrality of social relations, particularly gender relations, for feminist theorising. 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 the 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 theorising the good life is possible, requires radical restructuration before it can be regarded as offering a safe space for women.³⁸ I shall now outline some of the

³⁸ 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 (in Peterson, 1992a) 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

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 analyse 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 are seen as frequently 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 militarised citizenship, usually denied to women, or as legitimators of a kind of social order that can sometimes even valorise state violence.

Consequently, when analysing political/military security issues, feminists tend to focus on the consequences of what happens during wars rather than on their causes. They draw on evidence to emphasise 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 per cent at the beginning of the century to 90 per cent 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 per cent of the world's regular army personnel (United Nations, 1995: 45). As mothers, family providers, and care-givers, women are particularly penalised by economic sanctions associated with military conflict, such as the United Nations boycott put in place against Iraq after the Gulf War. Women and children, (about eighteen million at the end of 1993), constitute about 80 per cent of the total refugee population, a population whose numbers increased from three million to 27 million between 1970 and 1994, mainly due to military conflict (United Nations, 1995: 14).³⁹ Feminists also draw attention to issues of rape in war; as illustrated by the Bosnian case, rape is not just an accident of war but is, or can be, a systematic military strategy. Cynthia Enloe has described social structures in place around most army bases where women are often kidnapped and sold into prostitution (Enloe, 1993: 119).

For feminists writing about security, issues of structural violence have been as important as issues of military conflict.⁴⁰ According to the *Human Development*

accountability. This challenge seems to have saliency in an era of 'globalisation' and its negative effects on marginalised populations documented by the *Human Development Report* (United Nations, 1995).

³⁹ 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 in Grant and Newland, 1991:96).

⁴⁰ The term structural violence was first introduced by Johan Galtung in the 1970s to describe decreased life expectancy of individuals due to economic deprivation. See Galtung (1971).

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 per cent are women: the number of rural women living in absolute poverty rose by nearly 50 per cent 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 per cent of the beneficiaries of credit programs; while women in Africa contribute up to 80 per cent of total food production, they receive less than 10 per cent of the credit to small farmers and 1 per cent 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 as gatherers of fuel and firewood or as mothers of sick children, women's lives are severely impacted by resource shortages and environmental pollution.

These are some of the issues with which feminists writing about security are concerned. They are not, however, issues considered relevant to traditional state-centric security concerns. Challenging both the traditional notion of the state as the framework within which security should be defined and analysed, and the conventional boundaries between security inside and anarchy outside the state, feminists embed their analyses in a system of relations that cross these traditional 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 relations that extend from the household to the global economy. I shall now elaborate on some of the ways that 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. Positivist theories which claim to offer universal explanations typically fail to recognise 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 analysed and understood. Feminists also caution that the way in which gender hierarchies manifest themselves varies across time and culture: therefore, theories must be sensitive to history, context and contingency.

Feminists have consistently challenged international theory's claim that the state can be taken as given in its theoretical investigations. Feminists assert that

only by analysing 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 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). As a result women lost much of their existing autonomy and agency, becoming more dependent on men for their welfare.

Consequently, the term citizen has also been problematic for women. As Carole Pateman 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 (Pateman, 1988). 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,⁴¹ women continue to be underrepresented 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 citizens, heads of households, and 'breadwinners' are not neutral but 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 have become naturalised, 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 behaviour 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. 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

⁴¹ 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 which did not receive much attention when the rationale of fighting for democracy was used to justify the Gulf War to the American public.

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 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 (Orford, 1996). This type of behaviour may also be aggravated by the misogynist training of soldiers who are taught to fight and kill through appeals to their masculinity; such behaviour 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 emphasised 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 relationships which have the effect of consigning women to households or low-paying jobs. Public/private boundaries have the effect of naturalising 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 socio-economic scale cannot be explained by market conditions alone but 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. Moreover, the clustering of women in low paid jobs or in non-wage work in subsistence or in households cannot be understood by using rational choice models because women may have internalised 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 which successfully compete in attracting multinational corporations often do so by promising them a pool of docile cheap labour consisting of young unmarried women who are not seen as 'breadwinners' and who are unlikely to organise to protest working conditions and low wages. 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, structural adjustment programs dedicated to economic 'efficiency' are built on the assumption of the elasticity of women's unpaid labour (Grant and Newland, 1991: 105).

In presenting some feminist perspectives on security, 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 each other. Through a reexamination of the state, feminists demonstrate how the unequal social relations on which it is founded both influence its external security-seeking behaviour and are influenced by it. Investigating the state as a gendered construct is not irrelevant to understanding its security-seeking behaviour as well as whose interests are most served by this behaviour. Bringing to light social structures that support war and 'naturalise' the gender inequalities of 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 can be formulated.

Conclusions

Feminist theorists have rarely achieved the serious engagement with other IR scholars that they have frequently called for. When they have occurred, conversations have often led to misunderstandings and other kinds of miscommunication, such as awkward silences and feminist resistance to calls for incorporation into more mainstream approaches. In this paper 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 realise that these encounters demonstrate misunderstandings on both sides, I have emphasised some feminist perspectives less familiar to IR scholars. Rather than structure this paper as one more call for renewed conversation, I have tried to suggest and analyse reasons for the frequent failures or avoidance of such efforts, comparing these failures to problems of cross-cultural communications.

Lack of understanding and judgements 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 which inform the conventional discipline. Since they grow out of ontologies which 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 theorising or the state-centric and structural

approaches which grow out of such theorising. They are also informed by different normative concerns.

Feminist epistemologies which 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 sceptical 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. Although they draw on epistemologies quite different from positivist international relations, they also are seeking better understanding of the processes that inform international political, economic and social relations. Building knowledge which 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 that they are actually broadening the base from which our knowledge is constructed. While feminist perspectives do not claim to tell us everything we need to know about the behaviour of states or the workings of the global economy, they are certainly telling us things which have too often remained invisible.

Feminists often draw on the notion of conversation when pursuing their goal of shareable understandings of the world. Sceptical 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 being equally valid as one's own.⁴² 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 positivist methodologies and from a discipline whose original goal was to better understand the behaviour of states in order to offer advice to their policymakers. Therefore, feminists must understand that their preferred methodologies and the issues they raise are alien to the traditional discipline; and IR scholars must realise that speaking from the perspective of the disempowered appears increasingly urgent in a world where the marginalised are the most likely victims of war and the negative effects of economic globalisation.

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 'scientific' IR has little to offer as to how to make cross-paradigm communications more effective and mutually successful, but feminists must

⁴² Jef Huysmans (1995:486) suggests that this dialogic approach, typical of late-modern or post-modern approaches to IR more generally, is inspired by the liberal idea of pluralism and a democratic ethos.

understand that methodologies relevant to the investigations of their preferred issues are not normally part of a graduate curriculum in IR; therefore, they appear strange, unfamiliar, and often irrelevant to those so trained. However, feminists, along with other post-positivists, 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 endeavours is more widely recognised and acknowledged as part of the discipline of international relations.

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