

# Gender in International Relations

## Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security

J. Ann Tickner

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*To Joan, Heather, and Wendy  
--feminists for the future*

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# Preface

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As a scholar and teacher of international relations, I have frequently asked myself the following questions: Why are there so few women in my discipline? If I teach the field as it is conventionally defined, why are there so few readings by women to assign to my students? Why is the subject matter of my discipline so distant from women's lived experiences? Why have women been conspicuous only by their absence in the worlds of diplomacy and military and foreign policy-making?

I began to think about writing this book as an attempt to answer these questions. Having spent my childhood in London during World War II and my adolescence in New York as part of a United Nations' family, international affairs were an important part of my early life. But, as one of only three female graduate students in my year in Yale University's International Relations Program in the early 1960s, I began to notice that the academic discipline that I had chosen, in part because of these formative experiences, was not one that attracted many women. Admittedly, when I returned to graduate studies in the 1970s, the number of women entering the field had grown: while I felt less isolated, I observed that women scholars and teachers of international relations were clustered in areas such as international political economy, development studies, and international political theory. I still wondered why so few women chose national and international security studies, the privileged core of the field.

My own research has been in areas such as Third World development, North-South relations, and peace studies-- areas that were far from the mainstream of international politics in the early 1980s when I began my academic career. Like many women in international relations, I did not choose to specialize in security-linked war and peace studies, usually associated with great power relations and power politics, areas central to the subject matter of the classical discipline.

As a teacher of international relations, however, I have, of necessity, familiarized myself with what some in my field would call the "important" issues of war and peace, generally defined as national security studies. But, as only one of three women out of a total of about sixty students who participated in a course on nuclear strategy at M.I.T. in the early 1980s, my contention that this is an area of international relations not heavily populated by women was strongly reinforced. Trying to familiarize myself with the arcane and esoteric language of nuclear strategy, I remembered with some sympathy how, as an undergraduate history major, I had avoided details of war-fighting strategies and weapons development.

Since I began teaching these issues myself, often using the same language that I found so alienating in my own education, I have found that, while many of my male students seem quite comfortable with the discourse of war and weaponry in my introductory course on international relations, a semester has never passed without some of my female students expressing privately that they fear they will not do well in this course because it does not seem to be "their subject." In trying to reassure these women that they can be successful, I have often paused to reflect on whether this is "my subject." Frequently, I have been the only woman on professional panels in my field, and I am disappointed that I cannot find more women theorists of international relations to assign to my students. Just as the traditional subject matter of my discipline has been constructed without reference to most of women's lived experiences, women have

rarely been portrayed as actors on the stage of international politics.

Rather than discussing strategies for bringing more women into the international relations discipline as it is conventionally defined, I shall seek answers to my questions by bringing to light what I believe to be the masculinist underpinnings of the field. I shall also examine what the discipline might look like if the central realities of women's day-to-day lives were included in its subject matter. Making women's experiences visible allows us to see how gender relations have contributed to the way in which the field of international relations is conventionally constructed and to reexamine the traditional boundaries of the field. Drawing attention to gender hierarchies that privilege men's knowledge and men's experiences permits us to see that it is these experiences that have formed the basis of most of our knowledge about international politics. It is doubtful whether we can achieve a more peaceful and just world, a goal of many scholars both women and men who write about international politics, while these gender hierarchies remain in place.

Although this book is an attempt to make the discipline of international relations more relevant to women's lives, I am not writing it only for women; I hope that its audience will include both women and men who are seeking a more inclusive approach to the way we think about international politics. Women have spoken and written on the margins of international relations because it is to the margins that their experiences have been relegated. Not until international politics is an arena that values the lived experiences of us all can we truly envisage a more comprehensive and egalitarian approach that, it is to be hoped, could lead to a more peaceful world. Because gender hierarchies have contributed to the perpetuation of global insecurities, all those concerned with international affairs-- men and women alike-- should also be concerned with understanding and overcoming their effects.

I have attempted to present the material in this book in a way that is accessible to readers in both the discipline of international relations and the discipline of feminist studies. Since I focus on the issue of global security, the book should also be of interest to those in the peace studies field, as well as to a more general audience seeking new ways to think about international politics. Trained in the discipline of international relations, I began my own intellectual journey toward the feminist perspectives on international relations I am presenting when I read Evelyn Fox Keller's *Reflections on Gender and Science*. When I subsequently sat in on her course on gender and science at M.I.T. in 1986, my initial thought that her feminist critique of the natural sciences could be applied to theories of international relations was confirmed.

In June 1988 I was invited to participate in one of the first conferences on gender and international relations held at the London School of Economics. In the spring of 1989 I was privileged to be able to participate in the first graduate seminar on women and international relations in the Department of International Relations at the L.S.E. During that time, my early thoughts on the subject benefited from discussions with Fred Halliday, Kathleen Newland, and Rebecca Grant. With the support of a Batchelor Ford Faculty Fellowship from Holy Cross College, I spent the remainder of that semester at the Center for Women Scholars and Research on Women at Uppsala University. I am grateful to Mona Eliasson, the director of the center, who provided support and encouragement during those early stages of this work. Readers will recognize the influence of Scandinavian peace research in my multidimensional definition of global security. Time spent at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University was important in helping me to think about how I could reconceptualize this definition of global security using a feminist perspective. I am grateful to Peter Wallensteen and other members of that department for their support and interest.

On this side of the Atlantic, I am grateful to the women associated with the newly formed Feminist Theory and Gender Studies section of the International Studies Association. Through participation on panels at various I.S.A. meetings, as well as informal discussions with these women, many of my earlier ideas on gender in international relations have been sharpened or revised. For their reading and comments on particular portions of the book, I would like to thank Nazli Choucri, Irene Diamond, Jean Elshtain, Cynthia Enloe, Peter Haas, Welling Hall, Craig Murphy, Susan Okin, Carole Pateman, Spike Peterson, Anne Runyan, and Jutta Weldes. At Holy Cross College, I have appreciated the advice of my colleagues Hilde Hein, Diane Bell, and the late Maurizio Vannicelli, whose support of and insightful comments on all my work will be greatly missed in the future.

The final draft of this book was written during the academic year 1990-91 when I was a visiting research scholar at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. I am grateful to Susan Bailey and Jan Putnam as well as to other visiting scholars and members of the staff at the center for providing the friendly and supportive atmosphere needed to finish this project. To Peggy McIntosh I owe a particular debt of gratitude for her willingness to share many insights that have helped me to become a better feminist. I am also grateful to Holy Cross College for providing the luxury of a sabbatical leave during which this project was completed.

I should especially like to thank Robert Keohane whose initial encouragement and continued support were important to me in deciding to undertake research in what is still a very new and relatively uncharted approach to international relations. I also appreciated his thoughtful comments on this manuscript. I am grateful to Kate Wittenberg, editor in chief at Columbia University Press, who has contributed a great deal to the realization of this project from the start, and to Anne McCoy, managing editor at the press. Helen Milner, coeditor of the press's series on New Directions in World Politics, James Der Derian, and Mona Harrington offered thoughtful and useful suggestions on the manuscript. Finally, to my husband, Hayward Alker, I owe a special word of appreciation. While he has always been a source of support for my professional endeavors, I have also benefited enormously from his comments on the entire manuscript.

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[Gender in International Relations](#)

# 1. Engendered Insecurities: Feminist Perspectives on International Relations

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*Too often the great decisions are originated and given form in bodies made up wholly of men, or so completely dominated by them that whatever of special value women have to offer is shunted aside without expression.*

Eleanor Roosevelt

*Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.*

Simone de Beauvoir \*

As Eleanor Roosevelt and countless others have observed, international politics is a man's world. It is a world inhabited by diplomats, soldiers, and international civil servants most of whom are men. Apart from the occasional head of state, there is little evidence to suggest that women have played much of a role in shaping foreign policy in any country in the twentieth century. In the United States in 1987, women constituted less than 5 percent of the senior Foreign Service ranks, and in the same year, less than 4 percent of the executive positions in the Department of Defense were held by women. <sup>1</sup> Although it is true that women are underrepresented in all top-level government positions in the United States and elsewhere, they encounter additional difficulties in positions having to do with international politics. The following stories can help us to understand why.

Before the superpower summit in Geneva in 1985, Donald Regan, then White House chief of staff, told a *Washington Post* reporter that women would not understand the issues at stake at that meeting. As reported in the *Boston Globe* of October 10, 1985, Regan claimed that women are "not... going to understand [missile] throw-weights or what is happening in Afghanistan or what is happening in human rights. ... Some women will, but most women... would rather read the human interest stuff of what happened." Protesting Regan's remarks, feminists cited women's prominent roles in the various peace movements of the twentieth century as evidence of their competency in international affairs. <sup>2</sup>

When Bella Abzug entered the House of Representatives in 1972, she claimed that ending the war in Vietnam was the most important item on the congressional agenda and the one on which she most wanted to work as the representative of the many women and men in her district who opposed the war. With this goal in mind, Abzug requested a seat on the House Armed Services Committee, a committee on which, in 1972, no woman had served in the past twenty-two years. Abzug's request was denied by members of the House leadership, one of whom suggested that the Agriculture Committee would be more appropriate. In her account of this incident, Abzug notes that, of the twelve women in the House of Representatives in 1972, five were assigned to the Education and Labor Committee, evidence that suggests that women in politics are channeled into certain arenas of public policy that are perceived as "women's issues." <sup>3</sup>

More recently, a picture of Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder crying on her husband's shoulder, which appeared on the front page of several major American newspapers after she withdrew from the presidential primary campaign in September 1987, stimulated subsequent discussion about her suitability as a presidential candidate. The discussion revealed that, even though Schroeder is one of the very few women who has served on the House Armed Services Committee, many people in the United States had strong misgivings over the thought of an emotional woman with her finger on the nuclear button. 4

Each of these stories reinforces the belief, widely held in the United States and throughout the world by both men and women, that military and foreign policy are arenas of policy-making least appropriate for women. Strength, power, autonomy, independence, and rationality, all typically associated with men and masculinity, are characteristics we most value in those to whom we entrust the conduct of our foreign policy and the defense of our national interest. Those women in the peace movements, whom feminist critics of Donald Regan cited as evidence for women's involvement in international affairs, are frequently branded as naive, weak, and even unpatriotic. When we think about the definition of a patriot, we generally think of a man, often a soldier who defends his homeland, most especially his women and children, from dangerous outsiders. (We sometimes even think of a missile or a football team.) The Schroeder story suggests that even women who have experience in foreign policy issues are perceived as being too emotional and too weak for the tough life-and-death decisions required for the nation's defense. Weakness is always considered a danger when issues of national security are at stake: the president's dual role as commander in chief reinforces our belief that qualities we associate with "manliness" are of utmost importance in the selection of our presidents.

The few women who do make it into the foreign policy establishment often suffer from this negative perception: Jeane Kirkpatrick is one such example. Attracted by her authoritative and forceful public style and strong anticommunist rhetoric, Ronald Reagan appointed Kirkpatrick as ambassador to the United Nations in 1981. Yet in spite of the visibility she achieved due to her strong stance against anti-American voices at the United Nations, Kirkpatrick complained of not being taken seriously by her peers both in the United Nations and in the U.S. foreign policy establishment. Although other American ambassadors to the United Nations have also complained that they lack influence over U.S. foreign policy-making, Kirkpatrick specifically attributed this lack of respect to her sex: describing herself to one reporter as a "mouse in a man's world," Kirkpatrick claimed that her views were seldom listened to and that she failed to have any effect whatsoever on the course of American foreign policy. 5

The experiences of Abzug, Schroeder, and Kirkpatrick-- women with very different political perspectives (two liberal Democrats and one conservative Republican)-- are examples of the difficulties that women face when they try to enter the elite world of foreign policy decision-making. In this book, however, I do not intend to focus on strategies to increase the number of women in high foreign policy positions. I believe that these gender-related difficulties are symptomatic of a much deeper issue that I do wish to address: the extent to which international politics is such a thoroughly masculinized sphere of activity that women's voices are considered inauthentic. Therefore my attempt is to step back from the experiences of the few women who have tried to operate in the world of international politics, sometimes even successfully, and to examine how this world is constructed. By analyzing some of the writings of those who have tried to describe, explain, and prescribe for the behavior of states in the international system, we can begin to understand some of the deeper reasons for women's pervasive exclusion from foreign policy-making-- for it is in the way that we are taught to think about international politics that the attitudes I have described are shaped.

With its focus on the "high" politics of war and Realpolitik, the traditional Western academic discipline of international relations privileges issues that grow out of men's experiences; we are socialized into believing that war and power politics are spheres of activity with which men have a special affinity and that their voices in describing and prescribing for this world are therefore likely to be more authentic. The roles traditionally ascribed to women-- in reproduction, in households, and even in the economy-- are generally considered irrelevant to the traditional construction of the field. Ignoring women's experiences contributes not only to their exclusion but also to a process of self-selection that results in an overwhelmingly male population both in the foreign policy world and in the academic field of international relations. This selection process begins with the way we are taught to think about world politics; if women's experiences were to be included, a radical redefinition of the field would have to take place.

The purpose of this book is to begin to think about how the discipline of international relations might look if gender were included as a category of analysis and if women's experiences were part of the subject matter out of which its theories are constructed. Until gender hierarchies are eliminated, hierarchies that privilege male characteristics and men's knowledge and experiences, and sustain the kind of attitudes toward women in foreign policy that I have described, I do not believe that the marginalization of women in matters related to international politics is likely to change.

## **Gender in International Relations**

While the purpose of this book is to introduce gender as a category of analysis into the discipline of international relations, the marginalization of women in the arena of foreign policy-making through the kind of gender stereotyping that I have described suggests that international politics has always been a gendered activity in the modern state system. Since foreign and military policy-making has been largely conducted by men, the discipline that analyzes these activities is bound to be primarily about men and masculinity. We seldom realize we think in these terms, however; in most fields of knowledge we have become accustomed to equating what is human with what is masculine. Nowhere is this more true than in international relations, a discipline that, while it has for the most part resisted the introduction of gender into its discourse, bases its assumptions and explanations almost entirely on the activities and experiences of men. Any attempt to introduce a more explicitly gendered analysis into the field must therefore begin with a discussion of masculinity.

Masculinity and politics have a long and close association. Characteristics associated with "manliness," such as toughness, courage, power, independence, and even physical strength, have, throughout history, been those most valued in the conduct of politics, particularly international politics. Frequently, manliness has also been associated with violence and the use of force, a type of behavior that, when conducted in the international arena, has been valorized and applauded in the name of defending one's country.

This celebration of male power, particularly the glorification of the male warrior, produces more of a gender dichotomy than exists in reality for, as R. W. Connell points out, this stereotypical image of masculinity does not fit most men. Connell suggests that what he calls "hegemonic masculinity," a type of culturally dominant masculinity that he distinguishes from other subordinated masculinities, is a socially constructed cultural ideal that, while it does not correspond to the actual personality of the majority of men, sustains patriarchal authority and legitimizes a patriarchal political and social order. 6

Hegemonic masculinity is sustained through its opposition to various subordinated and devalued masculinities, such as homosexuality, and, more important, through its relation to various devalued femininities. Socially constructed gender differences are based on socially sanctioned, unequal relationships between men and women that reinforce compliance with men's stated superiority. Nowhere in the public realm are these stereotypical gender images more apparent than in the realm of international politics, where the characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity are projected onto the behavior of states whose success as international actors is measured in terms of their power capabilities and capacity for self-help and autonomy.

Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity depends on its opposition to and unequal relationship with various subordinated femininities. Many contemporary feminists draw on similarly socially constructed, or engendered, relationships in their definition of gender difference. Historically, differences between men and women have usually been ascribed to biology. But when feminists use the term *gender* today, they are not generally referring to biological differences between males and females, but to a set of culturally shaped and defined characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity. These characteristics can and do vary across time and place. In this view, biology may constrain behavior, but it should not be used "deterministically" or "naturally" to justify practices, institutions, or choices that could be other than they are. While what it means to be a man or a woman varies across cultures and history, in most cultures gender differences signify relationships of inequality and the domination of women by men.

Joan Scott similarly characterizes gender as "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and... a primary way of signifying relationships of power." <sup>7</sup> Indeed one could characterize most contemporary feminist scholarship in terms of the dual beliefs that gender difference has played an important and essential role in the structuring of social inequalities in much of human history and that the resulting differences in self-identifications, human understandings, social status, and power relationships are unjustified.

Scott claims that the way in which our understanding of gender signifies relationships of power is through a set of normative concepts that set forth interpretations of the meanings of symbols. In Western culture, these concepts take the form of fixed binary oppositions that categorically assert the meaning of masculine and feminine and hence legitimize a set of unequal social relationships. <sup>8</sup> Scott and many other contemporary feminists assert that, through our use of language, we come to perceive the world through these binary oppositions. Our Western understanding of gender is based on a set of culturally determined binary distinctions, such as public versus private, objective versus subjective, self versus other, reason versus emotion, autonomy versus relatedness, and culture versus nature; the first of each pair of characteristics is typically associated with masculinity, the second with femininity. <sup>9</sup> Scott claims that the hierarchical construction of these distinctions can take on a fixed and permanent quality that perpetuates women's oppression: therefore they must be challenged. To do so we must analyze the way these binary oppositions operate in different contexts and, rather than accepting them as fixed, seek to displace their hierarchical construction. <sup>10</sup> When many of these differences between women and men are no longer assumed to be natural or fixed, we can examine how relations of gender inequality are constructed and sustained in various arenas of public and private life. In committing itself to gender as a category of analysis, contemporary feminism also commits itself to gender equality as a social goal.

Extending Scott's challenge to the field of international relations, we can immediately detect a similar set

of hierarchical binary oppositions. But in spite of the seemingly obvious association of international politics with the masculine characteristics described above, the field of international relations is one of the last of the social sciences to be touched by gender analysis and feminist perspectives. <sup>11</sup> The reason for this, I believe, is not that the field is gender neutral, meaning that the introduction of gender is irrelevant to its subject matter as many scholars believe, but that it is so thoroughly masculinized that the workings of these hierarchical gender relations are hidden.

Framed in its own set of binary distinctions, the discipline of international relations assumes similarly hierarchical relationships when it posits an anarchic world "outside" to be defended against through the accumulation and rational use of power. In political discourse, this becomes translated into stereotypical notions about those who inhabit the outside. Like women, foreigners are frequently portrayed as "the other": nonwhites and tropical countries are often depicted as irrational, emotional, and unstable, characteristics that are also attributed to women. The construction of this discourse and the way in which we are taught to think about international politics closely parallel the way in which we are socialized into understanding gender differences. To ignore these hierarchical constructions and their relevance to power is therefore to risk perpetuating these relationships of domination and subordination. But before beginning to describe what the field of international relations might look like if gender were included as a central category of analysis, I shall give a brief historical overview of the field as it has traditionally been constructed.

## **International Relations Theory in the Cold War Era**

### **Realism**

Writing on the eve of the Second World War, historian E. H. Carr claimed that it was the devastating events of World War I that motivated the founding of the discipline of international relations. Before 1914 international relations had been largely the concern of professional practitioners. But the enormous destruction caused by World War I, and the search for new methods to prevent its happening again, brought demands for the democratization of both the theory and practice of international relations. <sup>12</sup>

According to Carr, the initial course of this new academic discipline was marked by a passionate desire to prevent another war. In the interwar period, it focused on international law and collective security, epitomized in the League of Nations, as mechanisms with which to prevent future conflicts. But when the limitations of the League and its collective security system were seen as contributing to the outbreak of World War II, the discipline turned to what its proponents have labeled political realism.

Thus the discipline of international relations began as a field that was concerned with breaking the seemingly inevitable cycle of international war. But when a war of even greater devastation broke out in 1939, the disillusionment with what was seen as mistaken idealism, embodied in pacifist policies of democratic states in the 1930s, moved certain scholars toward what they termed a more "realistic" approach to international politics. Realist scholars and practitioners such as George Kennan and Henry Kissinger, noting the dangers of popular passions and the influence of uninformed citizens on foreign policy, argued for the conduct of foreign affairs by detached "objective" elites insulated from the dangers of the moralism and legalism that had had such detrimental effects on earlier American foreign policy. <sup>13</sup> Realists claimed that conflict was inevitable: the best way to assure the security of states is therefore to prepare for war.

While most contemporary scholars of international relations have drawn on the historical writings of the classical Greeks as well as on those of early modern Western political theorists such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau, the central concern of realism, the dominant paradigm in international relations since 1945, has been with issues of war and national security in the post-World War II international system. <sup>14</sup> Profoundly influenced by events in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s whence many of its early scholars came, political realism has been primarily concerned with explaining the causes of international wars and the rise and fall of states. Generally Anglo-American in their orientation, realists, described by one author as the "fathers of the classical tradition," <sup>15</sup> have concentrated their investigations on the power-balancing activities of the great powers.

Reacting against the failure of what they have termed the "idealist" tradition of the early twentieth century, realists take as their basic assumption a dangerous world devoid of an overarching authority to keep the peace. In this "anarchical" world, realists prescribe the accumulation of power and military strength to assure state survival, the protection of an orderly "domestic" space, and the pursuit of legitimate national interests beyond one's territorial boundaries. The state of Cold War in the latter half of the twentieth century led many of these scholars to focus on Soviet-American relations and military arms races and ensured the predominance of realist explanations of and prescriptions for state behavior in the international system.

Since many of the early writers in the classical realist tradition were European men whose lives had been disrupted by the ideologies of totalitarian regimes of the 1930s, realism strove for an objectivist methodology that, by discovering generalizable laws, could offer universalistic explanations for the behavior of states across time and space. Claiming that ideology was a cloak for the operation of Realpolitik, the goal was to be able to exercise more control over an unpredictable international environment. For realists, morality is problematic in the tough world of international politics; in fact the exercise of moral restraint, epitomized by the policies of British prime minister Neville Chamberlain in the interwar period, can be a prescription for disaster. In the United States in the 1960s, however, classical realism came under attack, not so much for its basic assumptions and goals but for its methodology, which critics faulted for failing to live up to the standards of a positivist science. These early critics of realism noted its imprecision and lack of scientific rigor. In an attempt to make the methodology of international relations more rigorous and inject a greater precision into the field, critics of classical realism advocated the collection and analysis of data relating to wars and other international transactions. <sup>16</sup>

Answering these critics, neorealists have attempted to develop a positivist methodology with which to build a truly objective "science" of international relations. Neorealists have used models from economics, biology, and physics, which they claim can offer universal explanations for the behavior of states in the international system. <sup>17</sup> The depersonalization of the discipline, which results when methodologies are borrowed from the natural sciences and statistics, has been carried to its extreme in national security studies, a subfield that has sought, through the use of operations research and game theoretic models, to analyze strategies for nuclear deterrence and nuclear war-fighting "rationally." <sup>18</sup>

## The Challenge to Realism

The promise of constructing a grand theory of international relations proved illusory. Knowledge

construction in the discipline has generally been driven by real world events, and realism appeared best to describe the political behavior of the great powers during periods of high political tension. In the early 1970s, realism was severely challenged at a time when the declining intensity of the Cold War and a dramatic rise in oil prices catapulted issues other than war and peace and Soviet-American relations to the top of the foreign policy agenda. The perceived challenge to national security, mounted by the action of the OPEC cartel, prompted some scholars to suggest that international relations must pay more attention to issues associated with economic interdependence and to activities of nonstate actors. This "interdependence" school also challenged realism's exclusive focus on political conflict and power politics in the international system by calling attention to relations between states, such as the United States and Canada or Western Europe, where war was not expected. Interdependence scholars claimed that the traditional approach was particularly unsuitable for explaining economic conflicts between advanced capitalist states. [19](#)

A more fundamental challenge to realism came from scholars influenced by the Marxist tradition. Motivated by a different agenda, one that emphasizes issues of equality and justice rather than issues of order and control, scholars using a variety of more radical approaches attempted to move the field away from its excessively Western focus toward a consideration of those marginalized areas of the world system that had been subject to Western colonization. When it became evident, in the 1970s, that promises of prosperity and the elimination of poverty in these newly independent states were not being fulfilled, these scholars turned their attention to the world economy, the workings of which, they believed, served to perpetuate the unevenness of development between and within states. Many of them claimed that a structural condition known as dependency locked these states on the peripheries of the world system into a detrimental relationship with the centers of political and economic power, denying them the possibility of autonomous development. [20](#) Marxists emphasized class divisions that exist in, and derive from, the world market and that cut across state boundaries. Peace researchers began to use the term *structural violence* to denote a condition whereby those on the margins of the international system were condemned to a shorter life expectancy through the uneven allocation of the resources of global capitalism. [21](#)

The introduction of competing theories and approaches and the injection of these new issues and actors into the subject matter of international relations were accompanied by a shift to a more normative approach to the field. For example, the world order perspective asked how humanity could significantly reduce the likelihood of international violence and create minimally acceptable conditions of worldwide economic well-being, social justice, ecological stability, and democratic participation in decision-making processes. [22](#) World order scholars questioned whether the state was an adequate instrument for solving the multiplicity of problems on the international agenda. Militarized states can be a threat to the security of their own populations; economic inequality, poverty, and constraints on resources were seen as the results of the workings of global capitalism and thus beyond the control of individual states. State boundaries cannot be protected against environmental pollution, an issue that can be addressed only by international collective action. World order scholars rejected realist claims of objectivity and positivist conceptions in the international relations discipline; adopting a specifically normative stance, they have postulated possible alternate futures that could offer the promise of equality and justice and investigated how these alternative futures could be achieved. [23](#)

In realism's subject matter, as well as in its quest for a scientific methodology, we can detect an

orientation that corresponds to some of the masculine-linked characteristics I described above, such as the emphasis on power and autonomy and claims to objectivity and rationality. But among realism's critics, virtually no attention has been given to gender as a category of analysis. Scholars concerned with structural violence have paid little attention to how women are affected by global politics or the workings of the world economy, nor to the fact that hierarchical gender relations are interrelated with other forms of domination that they do address. <sup>24</sup> In developing a perspective on international relations that does address the effects of these gender hierarchies, I shall therefore be drawing on feminist theories from other disciplines to see how they can contribute to our understanding of gender in international relations.

## Contemporary Feminist Theories

Just as there are multiple approaches within the discipline of international relations, there are also multiple approaches in contemporary feminist theory that come out of various disciplinary traditions and paradigms. While it is obvious that not all women are feminists, feminist theories are constructed out of the experiences of women in their many and varied circumstances, experiences that have generally been rendered invisible by most intellectual disciplines.

Most contemporary feminist perspectives define themselves in terms of reacting to traditional liberal feminism that, since its classic formulation in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, has sought to draw attention to and eliminate the legal restraints barring women's access to full participation in the public world. <sup>25</sup> Most contemporary feminist scholars, other than liberals, claim that the sources of discrimination against women run much deeper than legal restraints: they are enmeshed in the economic, cultural, and social structures of society and thus do not end when legal restraints are removed. Almost all feminist perspectives have been motivated by the common goal of attempting to describe and explain the sources of gender inequality, and hence women's oppression, and to seek strategies to end them.

Feminists claim that women are oppressed in a multiplicity of ways that depend on culture, class, and race as well as on gender. Rosemary Tong suggests that we can categorize various contemporary feminist theories according to the ways in which they view the causes of women's oppression. While Marxist feminists believe that capitalism is the source of women's oppression, radical feminists claim that women are oppressed by the system of patriarchy that has existed under almost all modes of production. Patriarchy is institutionalized through legal and economic, as well as social and cultural institutions. Some radical feminists argue that the low value assigned to the feminine characteristics described above also contributes to women's oppression. Feminists in the psychoanalytic tradition look for the source of women's oppression deep in the psyche, in gender relationships into which we are socialized from birth.

Socialist feminists have tried to weave these various approaches together into some kind of a comprehensive explanation of women's oppression. Socialist feminists claim that women's position in society is determined both by structures of production in the economy and by structures of reproduction in the household, structures that are reinforced by the early socialization of children into gender roles. Women's unequal status in all these structures must be eliminated for full equality to be achieved. Socialist feminism thus tries to understand the position of women in their multiple roles in order to find a single standpoint from which to explain their condition. Using standpoint in the sense that it has been used by Marxists, these theorists claim that those who are oppressed have a better understanding of the sources of their oppression than their oppressors. "A standpoint is an engaged vision of the world

opposed and superior to dominant ways of thinking." <sup>26</sup>

This notion of standpoint has been seriously criticized by postmodern feminists who argue that a unified representation of women across class, racial, and cultural lines is an impossibility. Just as feminists more generally have criticized existing knowledge that is grounded in the experiences of white Western males, postmodernists claim that feminists themselves are in danger of essentializing the meaning of woman when they draw exclusively on the experiences of white Western women: such an approach runs the additional risk of reproducing the same dualizing distinctions that feminists object to in patriarchal discourse. <sup>27</sup> Postmodernists believe that a multiplicity of women's voices must be heard lest feminism itself become one more hierarchical system of knowledge construction.

Any attempt to construct feminist perspectives on international relations must take this concern of postmodernists seriously; as described above, dominant approaches to international relations have been Western-centered and have focused their theoretical investigations on the activities of the great powers. An important goal for many feminists has been to attempt to speak for the marginalized and oppressed: much of contemporary feminism has also recognized the need to be sensitive to the multiple voices of women and the variety of circumstances out of which they speak. Developing perspectives that can shed light on gender hierarchies as they contribute to women's oppression worldwide must therefore be sensitive to the dangers of constructing a Western-centered approach. Many Western feminists are understandably apprehensive about replicating men's knowledge by generalizing from the experiences of white Western women. Yet to be unable to speak for women only further reinforces the voices of those who have constructed approaches to international relations out of the experiences of men.

"[Feminists] need a home in which everyone has a room of her own, but one in which the walls are thin enough to permit a conversation." <sup>28</sup> Nowhere is this more true than in these early attempts to bring feminist perspectives to bear on international politics, a realm that has been divisive in both its theory and its practice. Having presented multiparadigmatic, multiperspective descriptions of both disciplines, I shall be drawing on and synthesizing a variety of feminist perspectives as I seek to develop a gendered analysis of some of the major approaches to international relations.

## **Feminist Theories and International Relations**

Since, as I have suggested, the world of international politics is a masculine domain, how could feminist perspectives contribute anything new to its academic discourses? Many male scholars have already noted that, given our current technologies of destruction and the high degree of economic inequality and environmental degradation that now exists, we are desperately in need of changes in the way world politics is conducted; many of them are attempting to prescribe such changes. For the most part, however, these critics have ignored the extent to which the values and assumptions that drive our contemporary international system are intrinsically related to concepts of masculinity; privileging these values constrains the options available to states and their policymakers. All knowledge is partial and is a function of the knower's lived experience in the world. Since knowledge about the behavior of states in the international system depends on assumptions that come out of men's experiences, it ignores a large body of human experience that has the potential for increasing the range of options and opening up new ways of thinking about interstate practices. Theoretical perspectives that depend on a broader range of human experience are important for women and men alike, as we seek new ways of thinking about our contemporary dilemmas.

Conventional international relations theory has concentrated on the activities of the great powers at the center of the system. Feminist theories, which speak out of the various experiences of women-- who are usually on the margins of society and interstate politics-- can offer us some new insights on the behavior of states and the needs of individuals, particularly those on the peripheries of the international system. Feminist perspectives, constructed out of the experiences of women, can add a new dimension to our understanding of the world economy; since women are frequently the first casualties in times of economic hardship, we might also gain some new insight into the relationship between militarism and structural violence.

However, feminist theories must go beyond injecting women's experiences into different disciplines and attempt to challenge the core concepts of the disciplines themselves. Concepts central to international relations theory and practice, such as power, sovereignty, and security, have been framed in terms that we associate with masculinity. Drawing on feminist theories to examine and critique the meaning of these and other concepts fundamental to international politics could help us to reformulate these concepts in ways that might allow us to see new possibilities for solving our current insecurities. Suggesting that the personal is political, feminist scholars have brought to our attention distinctions between public and private in the domestic polity: examining these artificial boundary distinctions in the domestic polity could shed new light on international boundaries, such as those between anarchy and order, which are so fundamental to the conceptual framework of realist discourse.

Most contemporary feminist perspectives take the gender inequalities that I have described above as a basic assumption. Feminists in various disciplines claim that feminist theories, by revealing and challenging these gender hierarchies, have the potential to transform disciplinary paradigms. By introducing gender into the discipline of international relations, I hope to challenge the way in which the field has traditionally been constructed and to examine the extent to which the practices of international politics are related to these gender inequalities. The construction of hierarchical binary oppositions has been central to theorizing about international relations. <sup>29</sup> Distinctions between domestic and foreign, inside and outside, order and anarchy, and center and periphery have served as important assumptions in theory construction and as organizing principles for the way we view the world. Just as realists center their explanations on the hierarchical relations between states and Marxists on unequal class relations, feminists can bring to light gender hierarchies embedded in the theories and practices of world politics and allow us to see the extent to which all these systems of domination are interrelated.

As Sarah Brown argues, a feminist theory of international relations is an act of political commitment to understanding the world from the perspective of the socially subjugated. "There is the need to identify the as yet unspecified relation between the construction of power and the construction of gender in international relations." <sup>30</sup> Acknowledging, as most feminist theories do, that these hierarchies are socially constructed, also allows us to envisage conditions necessary for their transcendence.

## **Feminist Perspectives on International Relations in the Contemporary World**

The dramatic events of the late 1980s and early 1990s brought to light many of the shortcomings in realist explanations noted by critics for some time. Whereas the world wars of the first half of the twentieth century involved the transgression of great powers across international boundaries, most of the conflicts of the second half have taken place inside or across the boundaries of weak states. Although

they have frequently involved at least one of the great powers, many of these conflicts have not been fought to protect international boundaries but over ethnic or religious issues, or issues of national identity and national liberation. The militarization of the South, with weapons sold or given by the North, has resulted in a situation whereby the state is often perceived, not as a protector against outside dangers, but as the ultimate threat to the security of its civilian population. The precarious armed peace that characterized the relationship between the two superpowers during the Cold War owed whatever stability it achieved not to military strength but to the threat of nuclear obliteration of winners and losers alike: nuclear weapons and other modern military technologies continue to pose the threat of mass destruction.

These new threats to security demand new solutions quite at odds with the power politics prescriptions of traditional international relations theory. As we face the prospect that, by the year 2000, 80 percent of the world's population will live in the South, we in the West can no longer afford to privilege a tradition of scholarship that focuses on the concerns and ambitions of the great powers. Faced with a stubborn gap in living standards between the rich and the poor that some observers doubt can ever be overcome, realist prescriptions of self-help are inappropriate; the health of the global economy depends on the health of all its members. Environmental degradation, a relatively new item on the agenda of international relations, threatens rich and poor alike and appears intransigent to state-centered solutions. Along with the traditional issues of war and peace, the discipline of international relations is increasingly challenged by the necessity of analyzing the realities of economic and ecological interdependence and finding ways of mitigating their negative consequences. We must also face the reality of how easily these wider security issues, which threaten the survival of the earth and all its inhabitants, disappear from the agenda when military crises escalate.

Faced with a world turned upside down, the conventional discipline of international relations has recently been undergoing a more fundamental challenge to its theoretical underpinnings. Certain scholars are now engaged in a "third debate" that questions the empirical and positivist foundations of the field. <sup>31</sup>

Postpositivist approaches question what they claim are realism's ahistorical attempts to posit universal truths about the international system and the behavior of its member states. Like many contemporary feminists, these scholars argue that all knowledge is socially constructed and is grounded in the time, place, and social context of the investigator. Focusing on the use of language, many of these writers claim that our knowledge about the international system comes to us from accounts written by those in a position of power who use their knowledge for purposes of control and furthering their own interests. <sup>32</sup>

These scholars assert that, while realism presents itself as an objective account of reality that claims to explain the workings of the prevailing international order, it is also an ideology that has served to legitimize and sustain that order. <sup>33</sup> While many of the previous challengers of realism, discussed above, still spoke in terms of large depersonalized structures-- such as the international system of states or the capitalist world economy-- many of these poststructuralist writers attempt to speak for disempowered individuals on the margins of the international system. Besides questioning the ability of the state or global capitalism to solve contemporary problems, they pose more fundamental questions about the construction of the state as a political space and a source of identity.

These contemporary critiques bring the international relations discourse closer to some of the feminist perspectives that I have described above: yet issues of gender have been raised only marginally. In subsequent chapters, I shall insert gender more centrally into these disciplinary debates. I shall examine some of the theoretical approaches introduced in this chapter to see to what extent their assumptions and explanations depend on historical understandings of masculinity and femininity and the experiences of

men. I shall then ask how, if these gender hierarchies were made explicit and the experiences of women included, this would challenge the theoretical frameworks of these various approaches. I shall also examine what effect feminist perspectives would have on the way the field and its central concepts have been defined.

The following three chapters will focus on three topics: national security, political economy, and the natural environment. Besides being central to the contemporary agenda of international relations scholarship, these topics constitute the framework within which an important redefinition of the meaning of security is currently taking place. The achievement of security has always been central to the normative concerns of international relations scholars. But dissatisfied with the traditional models of national security, which focus exclusively on military security, certain scholars of international relations have begun to use the term *common security* to envisage a type of security that is global and multidimensional with political, economic, and ecological facets that are as important as its military dimensions. The security of individuals and their natural environment are considered as well as the security of the state. Certain peace researchers are beginning to define security in terms of the elimination of physical, structural, and ecological violence. <sup>34</sup> Moving the consideration of violence beyond its relation to physical violence allows us to move beyond simplistic dichotomies between war and peace to a consideration of the conditions necessary for a just peace, defined more broadly than simply the absence of war.

Defining security in terms of the elimination of physical, structural, and ecological violence is quite compatible with feminist theories that have long been concerned with all these issues. <sup>35</sup> Thinking of security in multidimensional terms allows us to get away from prioritizing military issues, issues that have been central to the agenda of traditional international relations but that are the furthest removed from women's experiences. Many of the values promoted by supporters of common security are similar to the characteristics that, in our culture, are associated with femininity. Yet, none of this new thinking has considered security from a gendered perspective. Any feminist perspective would argue that a truly comprehensive security cannot be achieved until gender relations of domination and subordination are eliminated.

I shall begin my investigation of gendered perspectives on global security in chapter 2 with an examination of the concept of national security, the way in which security has traditionally been defined in international relations. I shall examine realism, the approach that has been primarily concerned with issues of national security. I shall analyze the extent to which realist assumptions about the international system and the states that compose it rely on the experiences of men and privilege values that we have come to associate with masculinity. If we were to include women's experiences in our assumptions about the security-seeking behavior of states, how would it change the way in which we think about national security? Given the sexual division of labor, men's association with violence has been legitimated through war and the instruments of the state. Feminist perspectives must introduce the issue of domestic violence and analyze how the boundaries between public and private, domestic and international, political and economic, are permeable and interrelated.

In chapter 3, I shall discuss the three dominant approaches to international political economy-- liberalism, economic nationalism, and Marxism-- and ask how the introduction of gender would affect the assumptions, explanations, and predictions of these three paradigms. Just as Marxists have argued that the workings of the world economy cannot be understood without reference to class, feminists make

a similar claim with reference to gender. I shall examine the individual, the state, and class-- the central units of analysis for liberalism, economic nationalism, and Marxism, respectively-- to see whether these units of analysis evidence a masculinist orientation in the way they are described and in the interests they represent. I shall suggest that constructing perspectives on international political economy that include the insights of feminist theories and the economic activities of women could give us a different perspective on the workings of the world economy and the achievement of economic security for women and men alike.

In chapter 4, I shall explore some of the writings on the natural environment, the most recent issue on the agenda of the discipline of international relations. I shall trace the foundations of this newly emerging field of ecopolitics back to the nineteenth-century tradition of geopolitics. I shall argue that both this earlier tradition of geopolitics and most of the contemporary work on ecopolitics are masculine in their orientation, with common roots in an Enlightenment science whose goal was the domination of nature. Drawing on the work of ecofeminists, I shall then construct a feminist perspective on ecology that, I will argue, is more inclusive and egalitarian and that therefore offers more promise for the achievement of ecological security.

As Sarah Brown suggests, a genuinely emancipatory feminist international relations will take gender difference as its starting point but it will not take it as given. While attempting to explain how gender has been constructed and maintained in international relations, we must also see how it can be removed. <sup>36</sup> A world that is more secure for us all cannot be achieved until the oppressive gender hierarchies that operate to frame the way in which we think about and engage in international politics are dismantled. In my final chapter I shall argue that the feminist perspectives on international relations that I develop throughout the book are but an intermediate step toward the eventual goal of a nongendered perspective. I shall also argue that this nongendered perspective could truly offer us a more inclusively human way of thinking about our collective future, a future in which women and men could share equally in the construction of a safer and more just world.

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\*: Roosevelt epigraph from speech to the United Nations General Assembly (1952), quoted in Crapol, ed., *Women and American Foreign Policy*, p. 176; de Beauvoir epigraph from *The Second Sex*, p. 161. [Back.](#)

**Note 1:** McGlen and Sarkees, "Leadership Styles of Women in Foreign Policy," p. 17. [Back.](#)

**Note 2:** While Regan's remarks sparked protest at the time, the fact that he could make such comments with relatively little political damage is instructive. Gender stereotyping of the sort that diminishes women remains relatively uncontested in political discourse. Similar comments about minorities or ethnic groups would probably do more damage to politicians' careers. [Back.](#)

**Note 3:** Abzug, "Bella Abzug Enters the House of Representatives," in Barber and Kellerman, eds., *Women Leaders in American Politics*, p. 279. [Back.](#)

**Note 4:** *Boston Globe*, September 29, 1987, p. 1. [Back.](#)

**Note 5:** Crapol, ed., *Women and American Foreign Policy*, p. 167. [Back.](#)

**Note 6:** Connell, *Gender and Power*, ch. Characteristics that Connell associates with hegemonic

masculinity are also found in some women. The example of former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher would be relevant here; her "macho" qualities during the Falklands/Malvinas war of 1982 reinforced her legitimacy as prime minister and increased her popularity with the British electorate. [Back.](#)

**Note 7:** Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p. Scott's chapter 2, entitled "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," on which my analysis of gender draws, was originally published in the *American Historical Review* (December 1986), 91(5):1053-1075. [Back.](#)

**Note 8:** Ibid., p. 43. [Back.](#)

**Note 9:** Broverman et al., "Sex-Role Stereotypes: A Current Appraisal." Although the original study was published in 1972, replication of this research in the 1980s confirmed that these perceptions still held in the United States. [Back.](#)

**Note 10:** Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p. 43. [Back.](#)

**Note 11:** As of 1986, a study showed that no major American international relations journal had published any articles that used gender as a category of analysis. See Steuernagel and Quinn, "Is Anyone Listening?" Apart from a special issue of the British international relations journal *Millennium* (Winter 1988), 17(3), on women and international relations, very little attention has been paid to gender in any major international relations journal. [Back.](#)

**Note 12:** Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, chs. 1 and 2. [Back.](#)

**Note 13:** For a discussion of Kennan's views on this issue, see Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, pp. 5-8. [Back.](#)

**Note 14:** The most cited text in the twentieth-century classical realist tradition is Hans Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations*. My description of the classical realist tradition draws heavily on this work. Originally published in 1948, *Politics Among Nations* subsequently went through six editions, the last one published in 1985 after Morgenthau's death. Scholars trained in the discipline of international relations who have entered the policy world, such as Henry Kissinger and George Kennan, have generally come out of the classical realist tradition. [Back.](#)

**Note 15:** Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline*, p. 146. Holsti would be hard-pressed to find any "founding mothers" in a field that has been heavily populated by white males. [Back.](#)

**Note 16:** For examples see Small and Singer, *Resort to Arms*, and Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication*. [Back.](#)

**Note 17:** See, for example, Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*. [Back.](#)

**Note 18:** See, for example, Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*. [Back.](#)

**Note 19:** Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence*. [Back.](#)

**Note 20:** Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, and Cardoso and Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America*. [Back.](#)

**Note 21:** Galtung, "A Structural Theory of Imperialism." [Back](#).

**Note 22:** Falk, "Contending Approaches to World Order," p. 179. [Back](#).

**Note 23:** Falk et al., *Toward a Just World Order*. [Back](#).

**Note 24:** In *Sexism and the War System*, ch. 4, Betty Reardon points out that world order studies scholars and peace researchers are almost all men. She argues that, although little attention has been devoted to gender on the part of these scholars, all the systems of oppression with which world order scholars, peace researchers, and feminists are concerned are structurally interrelated. For a critique of Reardon's position see Sylvester, "Some Dangers in Merging Feminist and Peace Projects." [Back](#).

**Note 25:** Tong, *Feminist Thought*, p. My description of the varieties of contemporary feminist thought draws heavily on her chapter 1. [Back](#).

**Note 26:** Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 129. See also Hartsock, *Money, Sex, and Power*, ch. 10. [Back](#).

**Note 27:** Runyan and Peterson, "The Radical Future of Realism," p. 7. [Back](#).

**Note 28:** Tong, *Feminist Thought*, p. 7. [Back](#).

**Note 29:** Runyan and Peterson, "The Radical Future of Realism," p. 3. [Back](#).

**Note 30:** Brown, "Feminism, International Theory, and International Relations of Gender Inequality," p. 469. [Back](#).

**Note 31:** For a summary of these debates see Lapid, "The Third Debate." [Back](#).

**Note 32:** For a sampling of these writers see *International Studies Quarterly*, Special Issue on "Speaking the Language of Exile and Dissidence in International Studies." [Back](#).

**Note 33:** Walker, "Contemporary Militarism and the Discourse of Dissent," in Walker, ed., *Culture, Ideology, and World Order*, p. 314. [Back](#).

**Note 34:** Wallensteen, "The Origins of Peace Research," ch. 1 in Wallensteen, ed., *Peace Research*. For examples of new thinking on security see Ullman, "Redefining Security"; Buzan, *People, States and Fear*; Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, *Common Security*; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *Policies for Common Security*; Azar and Moon, "Third World National Security"; and Mathews, "Redefining Security." This Western new thinking on security parallels some of Mikhail Gorbachev's "new thinking" as outlined in his political report to the Twenty-seventh Party Congress cited in *Pravda*, February 26, 1986. [Back](#).

**Note 35:** It is interesting to note that women were also among the pioneers in the redefinition of international security. See Boulding, "Women in Peace Studies," in Kramarae and Spender, eds., *The Knowledge Explosion*. Boulding claims that often new ideas do not receive widespread attention in any discipline until they are adopted by men. She also makes the point that the discipline of peace research has been as male dominated as the field of international relations. [Back](#).

**Note 36:** Brown, "Feminism, International Theory, and International Relations of Gender Inequality," p.

Gender in International Relations