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# FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY MEETS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY: A FEMINIST VERSION OF DAVID AND GOLIATH?

— MARYSIA ZALEWSKI —

The feminist standpoint conception as I use it does not imply that feminist perspectives are necessarily superior in an absolute sense to traditional views—only that they contain valid insights into the complex realities of world politics ... the conception of a feminist standpoint provides a particularly promising starting-point for the development of feminist international relations theory.<sup>1</sup>

— Robert Keohane

International Relations (IR) theory has become more interesting of late. Feminists, philosophers, geographers, poststructuralists and postmodernists have found a foot-hold in the theoretical debates, so long dominated by those who seemed to prefer that International Relations theory remain insular, static and largely uninspiring.

For feminist theorists, it has been interesting to watch the ways in which International Relations scholars have grappled with the intricacies of feminist theory, and to wonder if the usual tendency for many International Relations theorists to take “lazy masculinist shortcuts”<sup>2</sup> would emerge in the treatment of feminist work within the discipline. Complex philosophical discussions about the nature of feminist epistemology—frequently represented by the typology of feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint and feminist postmodernism—can be too quickly reduced to banal and simplistic versions, such as Keohane’s treatment of feminist standpoint theory typified in the above quotation. Yet, despite the exhortations of scholars such as Anne Sisson Runyan and V. Spike Peterson,<sup>3</sup> few academics have undertaken the thorough consideration of feminist stand-

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1. Robert Keohane, “International Relations Theory: Contributions to a Feminist Standpoint,” in *Gender and International Relations*, eds. Rebecca Grant and Kathleen Newland (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), 41-42.

2. Cynthia Enloe, “The Gendered Gulf,” in *Collateral Damage*, ed. Cynthia Peters (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 132.

3. Anne Sisson Runyan and V. Spike Peterson, “The Radical Future of Realism: Feminist Subversions of International Relations Theory,” *Alternatives* Vol. 16 (1991): 67-106.

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point literature necessary for developing a genuine understanding of feminist theories.

In this article, I will address the complexities of feminist standpoint theory and its consequences for the field of International Relations. I have endeavored to contextualize the entry of feminist standpoint theory in International Relations, to outline its themes, and to discuss its use in IR theory. By the end of this article, I hope that through a deeper appreciation of the theory's attributes, it will be less tempting to diminish feminist standpoint theory as merely a type of "feminine assistance" helping (male) theorists to understand the "complex realities of world politics."

### The Context

International Relations theory has been undergoing intellectual ferment. The discipline of International Relations, usually marked by its theoretical insularity, has in fact been subject to occasional assaults on its staid theoretical premises. These intellectual interrogations have been characterized in grandiose style as the "Great Debates." The first "Great Debate" featured Idealism versus Realism and occurred during the 1930s and 1940s (winner: Realism). The second "Great Debate" concerned a dispute between scientific and classical approaches (or, "science versus history") in the 1960s (winner: positivism).

Since the early 1980s, the discipline of International Relations has been in the throes of a third debate, with positivism squaring off against post-positivism.<sup>4</sup> Within this third debate, many of the fundamental concepts, dichotomies and theories which characterize International Relations have come under "severe and sophisticated challenge."<sup>5</sup> Yosef Lapid maintains this third debate is a result of the demise of empiricist-positivistic philosophy which is evident throughout the social sciences. The failure of positivistic philosophy, which promised true knowledge about the world based on objective data collection, has "forced scholars from all the social disciplines to re-examine the ontological, epistemological and axiological foundations of their scientific endeavors."<sup>6</sup> Jim George also addresses the roots of the third debate, taking a broader view by focusing on the general patterns of dissent in social theory which have arisen since the 1960s. Lapid and George both claim that, within the discipline of International Relations, those scholars responsible for the importation of these "alien approaches to knowledge and society ... which repudiate (meta) theoretical dual-

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4. Readers wishing to know more about the first two debates should see: Steve Smith, "Paradigm Dominance in International Relations: The Development of International Relations as a Social Science," *Millennium* Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer 1967). For more analysis on the third debate, readers should see *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 33, No. 3 (September 1989).

5. Jim George, "International Relations and the Search for Thinking Space: Another View of the Third Debate," *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 33, No.3 (1989): 269.

6. Yosef Lapid, "The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-positivist Era," *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 33, No. 3 (1989): 235.

ism in all its forms"<sup>7</sup> include postmodernists, poststructuralists,<sup>8</sup> critical theorists and discourse analysts.<sup>9</sup> However, both conspicuously fail to mention feminist theorists. Yet feminist theory is a crucial part of this third debate.

Feminist scholars require the satisfaction of at least two conditions—intellectual space and social space—in order for their views to be heard.<sup>10</sup> The third debate in International Relations has opened up a flicker of intellectual space, giving feminists room for thought and articulation. The second condition—social space—has arguably sprung from feminist demands increasingly made since the 1960s with the resulting increase in the number of female academics. There have been some feminist interventions into International Relations sub-fields, such as development and peace studies. However, the core theories and concepts of IR, especially its dominant theory—Realism—have, until relatively recently, remained stubbornly untouched by feminist interrogations.<sup>11</sup>

Feminist theory itself has been undergoing rigorous intellectual debate, especially in regard to the nature of feminist knowledge and the theoretical justifications of feminist claims. In the words of Mary Hawkesworth, "What is the status of feminist claims about the world?... Do they capture the truth about social relations?... Or do they merely provide another perspective on the world?"<sup>12</sup> In order to grapple with questions regarding the status and validity of feminist knowledge, the following typology has been frequently used: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint and feminist postmodernism.<sup>13</sup>

The feminist empiricist accepts that reality is something that exists "out there" which we are able to "tap" into and discover truth—based on a scientific model of "discovering" the world. However, up to now, research and researchers have been tainted by entrenched misogyny and androcentrism (male centeredness). This has resulted in a distortion both of what is researched as well as the results of such research: knowledge. For feminist empiricists, this unfortunate situation can be easily remedied. They proffer that by including more female researchers, bias can thereby be removed; with more at stake, women are more likely to notice (and prevent) androcentric bias than men. This feminist empiricism is the philosophical underpinning of liberal feminism, the aim of which is to "add women and stir."

Whereas feminist empiricists retain the belief that objective knowledge of the world is indeed possible (given the proviso of eradication of bias), feminist

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7. George, "International Relations," 269.

8. Lapid, "The Third Debate," 242.

9. George, "International Relations," 270.

10. Jane Aaron and Sylvia Walby, *Out of the Margins: Women's Studies in the Nineties* (London: The Falmer Press, 1991).

11. Runyan and Peterson, "The Radical Future," 76.

12. Mary E. Hawkesworth, *Beyond Oppression: Feminist Theory and Political Strategy* (New York: Continuum, 1990), 190.

13. *Ibid.*, 191. This typology originates in Sandra Harding's *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). For a different rendition of the epistemological issues involved, readers should see V. Spike Peterson, *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)visions of International Relations Theory* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1992).

standpoint theorists claim that knowledge itself is a social construct formed by the prevailing ideological, social, and political setting. Feminist standpoint theorists argue that the group triumphing a monopoly on the production and dissemination of knowledge will, in the end, determine what actually "counts" as knowledge. Inevitably, that knowledge will reflect the interests and needs of the dominant or ruling group. Insofar as men have historically produced most of the knowledge base currently employed, the feminist standpoint claim is that this knowledge is partial, distorted, and reflects only the interests of men and masculinity. Oppressed groups—such as women—at the very least have the ability to project an alternative world view gleaned from their perspectives on the periphery. Such groups have different experiences and interests relative to the dominant group. In this manner, research based on these normally excluded lives will result in the development of a very different type of knowledge—perhaps leading to a complete reversal of what has traditionally been esteemed as knowledge.

Feminist postmodernism, on the other hand, rejects both of these positions. Its tenets maintain that feminist empiricism neglects the power dimension, and that it has a naive view of the construction of knowledge. In turn, it criticizes feminist standpoint theory as being overly committed to an essentialized view of woman which, despite its adherence to the social construction of knowledge, seems to attach itself to a notion of truth to which only women are privy. Feminist postmodernism aims to deconstruct and criticize rather than to prescribe. Its concern is with problematizing unitary and monolithic entities such as woman, man, truth, and knowledge, claiming that these are social or discursive constructs which have no meaning outside language and culture. Feminist postmodernists oppose all forms of essentialism—including conceptualizations such as "woman"—and seek to deconstruct such gender categories in order to demonstrate their fictitious nature.<sup>14</sup>

This typology has been imported directly into the third debate in International Relations and is used with great regularity. Feminist empiricism, in its guise as liberal feminism, is in continual use and postmodernist feminism has a growing number of supporters. However, feminist standpoint theory seems either to become marginalized and effectively dismissed, or is used in a way which tends to diminish its subversive intent. Of particular interest in the ongoing debate is the way established male IR scholars, such as Robert Keohane, have articulated their allegiance to feminist standpoint theory. I want to suggest that Keohane's version of feminist standpoint theory is inaccurate and ultimately does feminist standpoint theory a disservice. A discussion of the roots of feminist standpoint theory is necessary and will elucidate my concern.

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14. This is a very *brief* outline. Readers wishing to know more should start with Christine Sylvester, "The Emperors' Theories and Transformations: Looking at the Field Through Feminist Lenses," in *Transformations in the Global Political Economy*, eds. Dennis Pirages and Christine Sylvester (London: Macmillan, 1990).

## Feminist Standpoint Theory

### *Embryonic roots of feminist standpoint theory*

Feminist standpoint theory emerges from a concern that mainstream—or “malestream,” a term coined by Mary O’Brien<sup>15</sup>—theories of human development and behavior inadequately represent or explain the world that women see and experience. Worse than that, traditional theory reinforces women’s subordinate position in the world by depicting women’s realities and women’s ways of knowing as marginal, peripheral and inferior. Classical liberal feminism (whose underlying philosophy is empiricist) urged women to join the (public) world of men. History had taught us that women were indeed as capable of rational thought as men and it was no longer acceptable (at least in the Western world) to deny women the rights that men had. But “adding women” to malestream theory and practice seemed to assume that both traditional theory and practice were gender neutral and that women and their activities would be easily assimilated. Centuries of male bias and misogyny could be remedied by the stricter application of social science methodology: meaning simply upholding objectivity, allowing research to be tested for bias, and rigorously applying social science methods of collecting and analyzing data. But the tragic flaw of this liberal feminist assumption was that social scientific theories, concepts, epistemologies, and metaphysics were in fact already fundamentally structured by gendered categories. No amount of “adding women” to the Social Contract theories of Hobbes and Locke could eradicate oppression if indeed the Social Contract is predicated on a “Sexual Contract,” assigning women to be the property of men in civil (patriarchal) society.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Realist International Relations theory, premised as it is on power, control, and domination and the obliteration of emotion and altruism, necessarily strikes out all that is traditionally female.<sup>17</sup>

Some feminist theorists arrived at the logical conclusion that woman and things female had systematically either been excluded from the constructive constituents of Western knowledge or they had been merely structured in, in such a way as to relegate them to a subordinate place on the periphery.<sup>18</sup> These

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15. Mary O’Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981). This term is frequently used by feminist writers and is used primarily to illustrate the claim that many, if not all, theories of human behavior and development are premised on the male as norm, with male interests and needs as primary while the female is depicted as necessarily deviating from the male norm and, as such, is found wanting. If not used explicitly by feminist writers, it forms the implicit base of much of feminist work which aims to show just how mainstream/traditional/malestream theories construct and reconstruct the image (and perhaps the ensuing reality) of women being a “mutilated male” (Aristotle, quoted in Nancy Tuana, “The Weaker Seed: The Sexist Bias of Reproductive Theory,” in Nancy Tuana, ed., *Feminism and Science* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 151. Other useful references include: Ruth Hubbard, *The Politics of Women’s Biology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Jane Ussher, *Women’s Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1991); Sue Wilkinson, ed., *Feminist Social Psychology* (Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1986); and Mary E. Hawkesworth, *Beyond Oppression*.

16. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988).

17. J. Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992).

theorists, emerging from largely Marxist, socialist and radical feminist backgrounds, maintained that knowledge was the product of the prevailing cultural, historical and ideological setting.<sup>19</sup> Drawing on the insights of historical materialism, these feminist theorists concluded that knowledge in and of the world reflected the interests, values, practices and experiences of those producing it. However, women were notoriously absent from the production team. If knowledge is a social construct and reflects only the interests of men, they wondered, would the world look fundamentally different, would our perception and understanding of it be very different, if knowledge was produced from different realities, different versions of the world—from women's experiences? This question moved feminist theorists away from liberal feminist pleas for the recognition of the *sameness* of men and women, most specifically in the faculties of the mind, towards a plea for the recognition of the *differences* between men and women, particularly in the arenas of psychological training, social experiences and epistemic location.

### *Psychological training*

The world is marked by divisions. One of the deepest divisions is that of gender. Girls and boys are treated very differently. Expectations for male and female students differ markedly on the grounds of gender.<sup>20</sup> Women and men approach and experience adulthood steeped in instruction (verbal, psychological, cultural) which is both implicit and explicit as to the behaviors and aspirations appropriate to their gender. Is it any surprise that the psychic identities of men and women differ? But in what ways do they differ, how do we know they differ, and what are the implications of those differences?

For some answers to these questions, feminist theorists turned to psychoanalytic theory for illumination. Consider, for example, Carol Gilligan's work in *In A Different Voice*.<sup>21</sup> Gilligan disputed malestream theories of moral reasoning which were based on male experience. On a scale of moral reasoning constructed by Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, girls and women rarely managed to get past stage three, indicating their poor and inadequate performance compared to the "norm" exemplified by boys and men. Kohlberg was doing nothing more or less than following in the footsteps of Freud, who declared that women had a less well developed sense of justice than men, and all others—malestream, social, political and scientific theorists—who together further deepened and reified Plato's effective truism that "woman is a misbegotten male."

But rather than pursuing a liberal feminist strategy of straining to produce evidence that women are as capable of moral reasoning as men, Gilligan

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18. Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1983), 371.

19. These theorists include Elizabeth Fee, Jane Flax, Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock, Evelyn Fox Keller and Dorothy Smith.

20. See Chapter Two in Mary E. Hawkesworth, *Beyond Oppression: Feminist Theory and Political Strategy* (New York: Continuum, 1990).

21. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

explored the possibility that there were different *ways* of moral reasoning based on the different gendered roles that boys and girls learned with, often, great expertise. Boys may indeed tend to approach moral problems like a “math problem,” weighing up “rights” versus “duties.” However, girls, playing out the female gender role, tended to consider a wider circle of relevant issues, and are more concerned for the implications of moral judgements on human relationships rather than abstract notions of duties and rights. Of course, boys and girls, men and women, are not always adequate performers of their gendered scripts, although the feminist standpoint theorist would probably claim that there is more of a “gendered fit” than it is currently fashionable to admit in a postmodern community of multiple identities.<sup>22</sup> Feminist standpoint theorists turned to Gilligan’s work on moral reasoning, Chodorow’s work on object relations theory,<sup>23</sup> and Ruddick’s work on maternal thinking<sup>24</sup> to point to the possibility that there were alternate and traditionally *female* ways of perceiving and understanding the world. These female ways were *not* visions of the world based on biology; rather, they were based on differing psychological training.

If reality is not immediately accessible and is only available to us via interpretation, we must ask “what, then, is the language of interpretation?” Feminist standpoint theorists postulated the idea that the dominant interpretive lens through which reality had been visualized, and indeed which was then documented and relayed as “fact,” was one which reflected the concerns of men and hegemonic versions of masculinity. The implication that “objective” knowledge about the world and “neutral” methods for gaining knowledge about reality were instead smokescreens for male knowledge and masculinist methods was exciting if also quite alarming.

### *Social Experiences*

Perhaps Descartes died happy in the belief that he had solved man’s angst about the nature of human existence with the epithet “I think, therefore I am” solidifying the boundary between the body/physicality and the mind. The legacy of the Cartesian framework imposed a strict boundary between the body and mind as a receiver and creator of knowledge. The mind was the home of reason and rationality, which man used as tools to expose the essential “truths”

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22. The terms “multiple” or “hyphenated identities” are frequently used by writers adhering to postmodernist and poststructuralist ideas. They signify a distancing from and a disagreement with the modernist or Enlightenment depiction of unitary, monolithic, homogenous subjects, such as woman, man, proletariat. Instead it is recognized that people have many, often contradictory, identities which cross the boundaries of class, race, sex, age, etc. For many feminists, the recognition of multiple identities is also a response to feminists of color and Third World feminists who have trenchantly pointed out that the unitary category of woman used by Western feminists depended on their exclusion. Useful references include: Linda J. Nicholson, *Feminism/Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1990); Christine Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations Theory in a Postmodern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming); Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon, 1988).

23. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1982).

24. Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989).

of the world. Bodily and physical experience were deemed either irrelevant or to be overcome. Feminist standpoint theorists, building on the work of Gilligan, Chodorow, Ruddick and, later, Hartsock, Harding, Rose and Smith,<sup>25</sup> began to dispute this simplistic version of knowledge creation and knowledge of reality. Feminist standpoint epistemology forces us to realize that our understanding and perception of the world is deeply affected by our bodily interaction with that world. For feminist standpoint theorists, "being" cannot and should not be separated from "knowing." And there are differing ways of "being" in the world structured around the dividing lines of gender. The universal gendered division of labor assigns women work which is very different from that of men. Nancy Hartsock and Dorothy Smith have been the principal articulators of this point.<sup>26</sup> Smith claims that women's work is located primarily in the "bodily mode," whereas men's work is located more in the "abstracted conceptual mode." Women the world over are constantly involved in the creation and re-creation of the "daily" nature of everyday life. Cleaning, feeding, washing, and "in general providing the logistics of (his) bodily existence."<sup>27</sup> The pattern of women carrying out the work, which gives a concrete form to the abstract work of men without men having to dirty either their hands or their minds, is repeated with unceasing regularity. "They (women) do the routine computer work, the interviewing for the survey, the nursing, the secretarial work."<sup>28</sup> Women cook the food for men to eat, give birth to children for men to name, clean the toilets for men to use. All of this work, according to Alison Jaggar, hardly permits women



The central feminist standpoint claim is that different social groupings in the world develop different knowledge frameworks and different visions/versions of the world depending on their social, corporeal and material experiences and circumstances. If we accept that gender constitutes one of the most basic sources of division in society, then “in a society divided by gender, women will see and know differently from men.”<sup>30</sup> Women, as an identifiable social group, have the potential to develop an epistemological position which is different to the dominant framework but at the same time includes that dominant framework. All groups in any given society will assimilate and accept, to some extent, the dominant vision and perception of society. Indeed, dominant group experience generally dictates the “common-sense” of the age. As capitalist societies tend to breed a general belief in the essential “rightness” of the profit mentality, patriarchal societies instill an entrenched belief in the dominance of men and men’s interests. However, feminist standpoint theorists claim that the standpoint of the oppressed gives rise not only to a *different* epistemological position, but to one that is *advantageous*. This is because it provides the basis for a view of reality that is arguably more impartial as it comes closer to representing the interests of society as a whole, whereas the standpoint of the dominant group reflects the needs of only one sector of the population. Additionally, it is more difficult for members of the dominant group to share the oppressed’s perception of reality, resulting in the dominant group’s epistemic inadequacy. The oppressed, however, are privy to epistemic advantage.

#### *Epistemic Location/Advantage*

Out of oppression—physical, material, psychological, linguistic—comes epistemic advantage. Women’s locations on the peripheries and margins of society places them in positions whereby their capacities for perceiving, seeing and knowing the world are greater than those at the center. Women’s places, their corporeal and material realities, create the space to experience and develop alternative, different epistemological maps and mapping practices. How is this so? Ironically it is out of women’s responses to exclusion and subordination that this epistemic advantage arises. As “strangers” to the social order, women are privy to other visions of human phenomenon which do not fit neatly within the dominant forms of belief. However, it is not just women’s untheorized experiences or intuitive feelings which form the basis of a feminist standpoint epistemology: a number of prerequisites are necessary, including feminism and political and intellectual struggle.

Feminism is necessary to begin to understand society from the perspective of the outsider, the immigrant, the stranger. Using dominant frames of reference and understanding allows women little intellectual purchase or understanding of many aspects of their lives. Friedan’s depressed housewives of the 1950s and 1960s would be forever trapped in a vicious circle of self-blame and self-hate

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30. Sondra Farganis, “Feminism and the Reconstruction of Social Science,” in *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstruction of Being and Knowing*, eds. Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo (London: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 208.

without the insights of feminism, which provides the tools and concepts for explaining social phenomena without assuming the central, guiding force of male supremacy.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the “confusion” over the issue of consent in heterosexual liaisons, especially legally sanctioned relationships, would not appear as confusion in a society in which the construction of heterosexuality was not deeply tied to satisfying male defined needs.<sup>32</sup> But feminism requires a struggle. I do not speak lightly of dominant frames of reference and hegemonic epistemological maps and mapping practices. These are powerful and often all-embracing mechanisms, and it takes hard work and not a little intellectual and emotional pain to see clearly. In this sense the epistemic location of feminist standpoint is an achieved position, meaning that it is not automatic or “natural,” but must be struggled for both politically and intellectually, especially if the “common sense” of the age is to be rectified. It is also a position which exacts a certain cost, as anyone struggling to straddle a multiplicity of contexts will attest.<sup>33</sup>

### Feminist Standpoint Theory Meets International Relations Theory

Robert Keohane states that feminist standpoint theory “contains valid insights” which might help us better understand matters of world politics. I would classify this as a weak version of feminist standpoint theory, being merely additive; a strong version would adhere more closely to the theory’s subversive, transformative and feminist roots. Should International Relations scholars accept Keohane’s weak and, I believe, inaccurate and inadequate version of standpoint theory, whereby it is reduced to little more than interesting additional perspectives on the world? Or is there more scholarly and intellectual purchase to be had from thinking seriously about the challenge of a strong version of feminist standpoint theory which would require a fundamental restructuring of International Relations theory and practice? In this section I will describe how feminist standpoint theory has been used in International Relations theory. But it is not an easy task simply to “apply” feminist standpoint theory to International Relations. Elizabeth Fee, writing in 1983, claimed that the task of creating alternative frameworks for understanding reality was “rather like asking a medieval peasant to imagine the theory of genetics or the production of a space capsule; our images are, at best, likely to be sketchy and insubstantial.”<sup>34</sup> Writing in 1991, Sandra Harding, one of the most formidable of contemporary feminist standpoint theorists, refers to feminist standpoint

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31. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin, 1965).

32. Sheila Jeffreys, *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution* (London: The Women’s Press, 1990).

33. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Routledge, 1991); and Uma Narayan, “The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Northwestern Feminist,” in *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstruction of Being and Knowing* eds. Jaggar and Bordo (London: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

34. Quoted in Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, 376.

theory as a “new tendency in feminist thought.”<sup>35</sup> Obviously, it is not a simple task to re-imagine such a consolidated monolith as International Relations theory from an emerging body of thought.

*Pre-emptive Counter to Criticisms*

Feminist standpoint theory as I use it does not mean any of the following: (1) women are nicer than men, (2) there is only one feminist standpoint which all women (can) share, (3) feminist standpoint is only available to women, (4) women are, at the same time, inherently superior to and less fallible than men, and (5) feminist standpoint only adds an additional and interesting perspective to the world. These are some criticisms which have been levied on proponents of feminist standpoint theory; I have implied similar critiques.<sup>36</sup> However, before I continue with my analysis, I would like to briefly counter these claims.<sup>37</sup>

The claim that gender-infused lessons impart non-identical models of human behavior, understandings, values and moral codes does not have to imply that this makes women “nicer” than men. The imputation that feminist standpoint theory envisages a construction of a “nicer,” more peaceful and just world simply by replacing the men in power with women is a crude simplification and misrepresentation. Many women may indeed display certain characteristically gendered attributes (as do many men) but this does not have to lead to generalized assumptions regarding women’s temperaments.

Does the conception of feminist standpoint imply a univocal vision of the world—a joint female perspective? I contend that there is clearly not *a* feminist standpoint but, rather, a plurality of standpoints. The oppression of subordinate groups is not played out in exactly the same way in all societies. Women in Third World countries do not experience the same type of oppression as women in First World countries. As Sandra Harding claims, what grounds feminist standpoint theory is not women’s experiences per se but the view from women’s lives.<sup>38</sup> These views will necessarily be multiple as they are formed from the lives of very different women. However, what makes these views fundamentally different from mere competing perspectives inhabiting the world of the liberal pluralist is that a most crucial part of feminist standpoint is the word “feminist.” The implication of a theory of oppression and exclusion which is held within the word “feminist” will lead us away from the untheorized position of mere perspectives. And as there are multiple ways of being feminist, there will be multiple feminist standpoints.

On a related note, the claim is often made that feminist standpoint theory is available only to women: given what is asserted regarding gendered psycho-

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35. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, 136.

36. Marysia Zalewski, “Feminist Theory and International Relations,” in *From Cold War to Collapse: Theory and World Politics in the 1980s* eds. M. Bowker and R. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

37. This is a brief refutation. For additional discussion, readers should consult Harding, *The Science Question*; and Nancy Hirschmann, *Rethinking Obligation: A Feminist Method for Political Theory* (London: Cornell University Press, 1992).

38. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, 269.

logical, physical and social training, it might seem that standpoint visions are the preserve of those inhabiting female anatomies. However, this, too, is false. In practice it may prove more difficult for men, well trained in their gender roles, to participate in the political, emotional, and psychological struggle. In principle, however, it is not impossible (although it is clear that personal and academic motivation may often be absent). Sandra Harding stresses this notion with the claim that "women cannot be the unique generators of feminist knowledge ... women cannot claim this ability to be uniquely theirs, and men must not be permitted to refuse to try and produce fully feminist analyses on the grounds that they are not women."<sup>39</sup>

Does feminist standpoint theory fall into the same trap as less sophisticated radical feminist imputations, which claim female ways of being and knowing as essentially more pure and superior than the males'? Is the suggestion, as Mary Hawkesworth puts it, "that women's unique experience of reality enables them to pierce ideological distortions and grasp the truth about the world ... where men have gotten it wrong, women will get things right?"<sup>40</sup> I find this is a faulty assertion. As previously noted, this epistemological capability is not unique to women; feminist standpoint in principle is possible for all people. I think also that Mary Hawkesworth's claim about grasping the "truth" about the world unfairly attaches an extremely foundationalist label to standpoint theory.<sup>41</sup> Of course, standpoint theory may tend towards foundationalism, but this does not mean that standpoint theories are committed to essential truths about the world which women can discern where men have not been able to do so. The core claim is not that women are any less fallible than men, but instead that knowledge is a social construction which is crucially constituted by human beings in disparate social locations. These social locations are indeed variable, but one of their defining characteristics is that they display clear hierarchies. Some social locations and identities are, unfortunately, more equal than others.

### *Use of Feminist Standpoint Theory in International Relations*

A final criticism is the claim that the feminist standpoint position (only) adds an additional, helpful perspective on the world. To date, not a great deal has been written specifically on the application of feminist standpoint theory to International Relations theory. The two main proponents of specifically feminist standpoint theory are Robert Keohane and J. Ann Tickner.<sup>42</sup> J. Ann Tickner was one of the contributors to the pathbreaking "Women and International Relations" edition of *Millennium* with her article, "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of

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39. *Ibid.*, 286.

40. Hawkesworth, *Beyond Oppression*, 137.

41. Foundationalism is a philosophical term referring to the Enlightenment belief that there is a permanent, ahistorical, universal foundation (Archimedean point) for grounding all claims of knowledge. Foundationalism is severely contested by postmodernists (among others) who would claim that all knowledge is partial and reflects the interests of the powerful. See Hawkesworth, *Beyond Oppression*, 139.

42. Although *Gender and International Relations*, edited by Grant and Newland, is arguably very supportive of feminist standpoint theory.

Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation."<sup>43</sup> A revised version of the article appeared as a chapter in an edited collection, *Gender and International Relations*.<sup>44</sup> and the extended version came out as a book in 1992.<sup>45</sup> Robert Keohane was one of three authors to respond to this edition of *Millennium* with his article, "International Relations Theory: Contributions of a Feminist Standpoint,"<sup>46</sup> which also appeared in chapter form in Grant and Newland's edited text.<sup>47</sup>

What form of feminist standpoint do these authors employ? How do they think about feminist standpoint and what do they perceive to be the implications of feminist standpoint? As Robert Keohane admits that his remarks are highly tentative and not as thoroughly grounded in feminist analyses as they should be, he is perhaps too easy a target. On the other hand, as it might appear that he is installing himself as legitimator of a particular form of diluted feminism in an effort to discipline feminism so as to make it acceptable to International Relations,<sup>48</sup> his comments cannot not be treated lightly. Despite the tentative nature of his remarks, Keohane maintains that "the" feminist standpoint on certain conceptual issues in International Relations—particularly if combined with feminist empiricism—will provide the possibility for a "richer, more gender conscious formulation, and also to criticize the gender bias to be found in conceptions of interdependence and institutionalization created by men."<sup>49</sup> Key concepts selected for reconceptualization include power, sovereignty and reciprocity.

Power, for example, has consistently been defined within International Relations as being inextricably intertwined with control and domination. The old and influential Morgenthauian dictum of power being "control over the minds and actions of other men" has been a guiding principle of much of Realist International Politics. By using a feminist perspective on power, Keohane claims, we can emphasize that side of power which encourages the human ability to act in concert as opposed to control.<sup>50</sup> Following on from this, Keohane suggests that redefining power may help us to rethink the notion of sovereignty, the latter being caged by "male" thinking, which tends towards control and absolute categories.<sup>51</sup> Thinking in this way would, according to Keohane, lead us to question whether the concept of territorial sovereignty has anything to do with gender, such a question being fundamental to a feminist standpoint analy-

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43. J. Ann Tickner, "Women and International Relations," *Millennium* Vol. 17, No. 3 (Winter 1988): 429-41.

44. J. Ann Tickner, "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation," in *Gender and International Relations*, eds. Rebecca Grant and Kathleen Newland (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).

45. Tickner, *Gender in International Relations*.

46. Robert Keohane, "International Relations Theory: Contributions of a Feminist Standpoint," *Millennium* Vol. 18, No. 2 (1989): 245-53.

47. Robert Keohane, "International Relations Theory: Contributions of a Feminist Standpoint," in *Gender and International Relations*, eds. Rebecca Grant and Kathleen Newland (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).

48. See comments by Anne S. Runyan and V. Spike Peterson, "The Radical Future of Realism," 97.

49. Keohane, "International Relations Theory," in *Gender and International Relations*, 47.

50. *Ibid.*, 42.

51. *Ibid.*, 43.

sis of world politics.<sup>52</sup> As for reciprocity, Keohane suggests that feminist thinking, which emphasizes identification with others rather than differentiating oneself from others, "could be an important insight."<sup>53</sup>

I find that Keohane uses a rather weak version of feminist standpoint theory, which is confirmed by his comments quoted at the outset of this article. He sees feminist standpoint theory as a sort of additional or interesting set of insights, which might possibly help "us" understand the complex realities of world politics. Is there anything wrong with this? It might, at first glance, seem that Keohane is utilizing some work by feminist theorists in an accurate and arguably sympathetic and helpful way. The feminist pieces he cites include Hannah Arendt's work on power, Joan Scott's work on gender, Carol Gilligan's work on the ethic of care, Joan Tronto's work on the self, Evelyn Fox Keller's work on objectivity, as well as others. All of these authors have been extremely influential in the development of feminist standpoint theory and what they write about is indeed relevant. Yet it still appears that Keohane's article is deeply patronizing and it inadequately represents feminist standpoint theory to the extent that it does feminist standpoint theory a disservice.

Keohane's presentation of a diluted version of feminist standpoint theory sanitizes and potentially negates the subversive and specifically feminist component of standpoint theory. As stated above, the implication of a theory of oppression and exclusion held within the word feminist/ism, seems far removed from the image Keohane projects of feminist standpoint assistants supplying useful fodder to the "real" theorists of International Relations (namely men). Keohane's weak version of feminist standpoint thereby devolves into something which is not standpoint at all, but merely different perspectives on the world which might help us to better understand the existing (male-defined) agenda of world politics. Keohane's sketchy and selective use of certain feminist scholars' work gives the impression that all women share certain "gentle" views of the world which men have finally decided they will include, or at least think about.

In his article, Keohane also seems to imply that only women are capable of achieving standpoint (although I suspect he has not considered the achieved nature of standpoint).<sup>54</sup> If this is so, it leads to two contradictory points. Firstly, why and how is he writing about feminist standpoint theory? If such perspectives are available only to women, what gives him the right or the knowledge to write on these issues? But secondly, if feminist standpoint theory is something which men can, in principle, achieve, and is something they should be concerning themselves with, presumably because of some feminist commitment, why does he think that he can write about feminist standpoint theory, when on his

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52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*, 44.

54. Keohane implies that only women can articulate feminist standpoint theory throughout his chapter in Grant and Newland's edited volume. For example he claims that it is women's experiences on the margins which allows them to glean particular insights. If standpoint is only made up of the experiential component of those at the periphery then by definition, men, who are at the center, cannot be party to this experience.

own admission he doesn't know much about it? How would it seem if a feminist theorist, especially one of such eminent academic standing as Keohane, wrote an article on Realism, claiming she didn't know much about it? Is the implication that feminist standpoint theory is something simple, to be picked up and assimilated more quickly than the 'real' theories of International Relations?

Perhaps I am being too hard on Keohane. But feminist standpoint theory has come in for a great deal of criticism that it seems to me to be important that standpoint theory should be criticized for what it actually is, rather than for Keohane's trivialized version of it. If feminist theory is a form of subversive strategy,<sup>55</sup> intent on disrupting patriarchal discourses, feminist theorists have to be constantly vigilant at patriarchal attempts to resist such attempts at subversion. Keohane seems to imagine that "the" feminist standpoint perspective is designed to assist male theorists in their difficult work, the implications or results being possibly a more in-depth understanding of "world politics." I do not think that this is quite the sort of implication that standpoint theorists such as Harding, Hirschmann and Smith have in mind.

How does J. Ann Tickner's version of feminist standpoint fare? Tickner is better acquainted with feminist theory than Keohane and has clearly given the issue of feminist interventions into International Relations theory intense consideration, as evidenced by her recent book, *Gender In International Relations*. Her original article "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation" falls into the trap of re-presenting the weak version of feminist standpoint theory, talking of "adding a feminist perspective to International Relations" in an attempt to make the field of International Relations "more accessible to women scholars and practitioners."<sup>56</sup> While she does have a particular goal in mind—regarding access for female scholars—in general, the tenor of her original article leads towards a vision of feminist standpoint theory akin to adding useful, if necessary, corrections to distorted male views. However, her recent book evidences a movement towards stronger feminist standpoint theory.

Tickner defines the purpose of her book in terms of "how 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."<sup>57</sup> However, she confirms that this will not be a simple matter of introducing gender, as International Relations is clearly already a heavily gendered discourse. This, she claims, is evidenced by the maleness, masculinized and male dominated nature of practically all mainstream International Relations. Additionally, she acknowledges that there are multiple feminist approaches and tries to draw on and synthesize a variety of feminist perspectives in her endeavor to "develop a gendered analysis of some of the major approaches to International Relations."<sup>58</sup> Liberal, Marxist, radical, socialist,

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55. As suggested by Elizabeth Gross in Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Gross, *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1986).

56. Tickner, *Gender in International Relations*, 28.

57. *Ibid.*, 5.

standpoint and postmodern feminisms are all included. Apart from the knotty philosophical problems of conjoining disparate streams of theorizing to make a synthesis (there is not space to ponder this debate here) I would venture the claim that Tickner does indeed use feminist standpoint in a way that is clearly stronger and more sophisticated than Keohane's but which still, I think, falls short of the subversive intent of its main articulators.

Tickner's tendencies toward feminist standpoint are evidenced by statements such as the following:

"All knowledge is partial and is a function of the *knower's lived experience* ... knowledge ... that comes out of men's experiences ... ignores a large body of human experience that has the potential for increasing the range of options and opening up new ways of thinking ... feminist theories which speak out of the various experiences of women—who are usually on the margins ... can offer us some *new insights* ... feminist perspectives, constructed out of the experiences of women, can add a new dimension to our understanding ... drawing on feminist theories ... could help us to *reformulate* these concepts (power, sovereignty and security) ... the eventual goal (is) a nongendered perspective (of International Relations which) could offer us a more inclusively human way of thinking about our collective future."<sup>59</sup>

Despite Tickner's stated commitment to draw on diverse strands of feminist theory, it appears, in fact, that she relies heavily on feminist standpoint theory. In her gendering of the areas of national security, political economy and the natural environment, she frequently invokes the language and methods of standpoint, consistently attempting to reformulate these areas from a feminist perspective. In commenting on gendered perspectives of national security, she replays Kenneth Waltz's three levels of war causation: namely man, the state and the international system. She underscores the masculinist picture of the world this static realist model portrays: one that "requires war-capable states peopled by heroic masculine citizen-warriors."<sup>60</sup> Tickner claims that feminists should and will recognize the gendered construction of this three-tiered world picture and urges that "feminist perspectives on national security must offer alternative conceptions."<sup>61</sup> She makes similar claims about political economy and the natural environment, ending with the assertion that "the ultimate goal of such a (feminist) reformulation must not be to replace the masculinist perspective that presently obtains with a feminist perspective. The integration of feminist perspectives into the discipline is but a necessary first step toward transcending gender as a category of analysis."<sup>62</sup>

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58. *Ibid.*, 17.

59. *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

60. *Ibid.*, 50.

61. *Ibid.*, 51.



Tickner's use of feminist standpoint in International Relations is clearly more advanced and in greater depth than Keohane's. It is quite interesting to note that Keohane's comments on the flyer of her book include the phrase "her stimulating challenge can be disputed," indicating perhaps that he thinks she has gone a little too far. But I contend she does not go far enough. She tends to oscillate between *adding* gender as a category of analysis, and *recognizing* the gendered construction of International Relations. Of course the specific aspects of gender under consideration are different in each case: *adding* gender translates into including that which is female and feminine, whereas *recognizing* gender implies an acknowledgement of the depth and pervasiveness of gendering (and, in particular, the dominance of masculinity) already held within International Relations. The problem is that recognizing that International Relations is already a heavily gendered construction intimates that it will probably be impossible to "plug in" different constructions of gender—especially the "devalued" half of the hierarchical bifurcation, namely, all that is female and feminine. It is, after all, that hierarchy which privileges male knowledge to the extent that knowledge produced from this dominant standpoint appears as "natural" and "common sense."

Tickner also requests the *transcendence* of gender as a category of analysis. She claims the recognition that the hierarchies which characterize dualisms (man/woman, culture/nature, self/other, mind/body) are socially constructed "allows us to envisage conditions necessary for their transcendence."<sup>63</sup> One problem with this statement is, if the postmoderns are correct and the two halves of the dualisms exist by virtue of their oppositional stance to each other, then transcending them by using them is probably a contradictory and impossible exercise (although Tickner may not agree with the postmodern portrayal of dualisms). If woman only exists by virtue of the fact that she is both not a man and secondary to man, any efforts to recover or put in place equality for things female and feminine is literally impossible. A second point is that for hegemonic masculinity to be removed from its pedestal requires a self-conscious relegation of power. Given what Tickner says about the nature of power seeking that defines hegemonic masculinity (as its exemplar Realism attests), this attempt at feminist subversion will face serious patriarchal resistance.

Finally, Tickner often refers to *a* (singular) feminist perspective. This is a trap about which postmoderns and feminists of color have a major and understandable concern, the implication being that there is just one univocal woman's-eye view of the world. However, this problem is somewhat ameliorated by Tickner's wide-ranging use of examples from women all over the world and her obvious concern that "being unable to speak for some women only further reinforces the voices of those who have constructed approaches to International Relations out of the experiences of men."<sup>64</sup>

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62. *Ibid.*, 130.

63. *Ibid.*, 19.

64. *Ibid.*, 17. There is an on-going debate concerning the postmodern deconstruction of the category—woman. Many feminists are determined to retain the use of this category as treating

Nevertheless, Tickner is one of the first International Relations scholars to attempt to develop an in depth equivalent of "asking a medieval peasant to imagine a theory of genetics," and she is to be applauded for that. Her book certainly represents an advance for the study of gender within International Relations, not least, by inspiring others to raise questions such as the ones outlined above. For new realities to be envisaged, some hope and vision is necessary. Ultimately, however, I think that Tickner relies too much on the weaker additive version of feminist standpoint theory. While she does envisage an eventual reformulation of International Relations theory and practice, her central strategy for its achievement is introduce gender as a category of analysis. Given that International Relations is already deeply gendered and stultifyingly categorized, any transcendence will require more than additive remedies. Trying to add that which is devalued, the female and the feminine, might serve only to remind those supportive (implicitly or explicitly) of the ideology of hegemonic masculinity just how important and deeply believed that devaluation is. The current backlash against feminism is, I think, some evidence of this.

### Conclusions

One of the central aims of this article has been to rescue and revive the complexities of feminist standpoint theory from the intellectual tentacles of International Relations scholars whose tendency is to usurp, control and tame radical and subversive ideas. I do not claim that feminist standpoint theory is *the* approach that feminists should adopt, or that it is a complete and flawless theory. Many serious criticisms have been levied on feminist standpoint: it is unduly influenced by Enlightenment, modernist and therefore patriarchal modes of thought given to searching for metanarratives;<sup>65</sup> it has a simplistic but also monolithic view of the self;<sup>66</sup> it is a regressive theory given its foundationalist tendencies;<sup>67</sup> it is *essentialist*, invoking the spectre of "universal woman,"<sup>68</sup> its imputed universalism carries arguably heterosexist and racist overtones,<sup>69</sup> among other criticisms. Indeed, Jane Flax has recently implied that one of the

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women as if we were entirely fictional arguably makes light of the material realities which result from membership of this category. With the deconstruction of woman in mind, Stevi Jackson urges us to re-imagine the nineteenth century impassioned words of Sojourner Truth "Ain't I a woman?" spoken by a twentieth century equivalent, "Ain't I a fluctuating identity?" Stevi Jackson, "The Amazing Deconstructing Woman," *Trouble and Strife* Vol. 25 (Winter 1992): 30.

65. Linda J. Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1990); Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990); and Hawkesworth, *Beyond Oppression*.

66. Hawkesworth, *Beyond Oppression*.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

69. Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman, "Have We Got a Theory for You: Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism, and the Demand for the Women's Voice," *Hypatia: Women's Studies International Forum* Vol. 5, No. 4 (1983): 573-81; Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* Vol. 5, No. 4 (1980): 631-51.

reasons that some feminists respond with such horror to the dissolution of the unitary category of "woman" advocated by feminist postmodernism is that the latter perhaps does not allow for the chance to be implicitly racist. "Since directly attacking women of color or voicing our resentment of them (in public) would be politically unthinkable, is it easier and more acceptable for white women to express our discomfort with difference discourses and the politics of knowledge claims by categorically rejecting postmodernism and branding it politically incorrect?"<sup>70</sup> All these criticisms are very serious but do not mean that feminist standpoint theory can be written off altogether. Quite the contrary.

In a recent visit to Wales, Rob Walker claimed that International Relations is an arrogant and self-righteous reification of an ethics of exclusion.<sup>71</sup> Feminist standpoint theorists might be tempted to agree with him and would claim that the strong and, perhaps, *authentic* version of feminist standpoint theory demands that theory, thinking and understanding begin from the standpoint of those excluded—the oppressed. Such an endeavor will require a profound shift in the discourses of International Relations and the practices of IR scholars. As the medieval peasant is asked to imagine a theory of genetics, the International Relations scholar will be asked to stop taking the easy path by continuing to think like an (elite) man, and, instead, to try to imagine what it might be like to think and theorize about reality which does not start from the standpoint of the dominant group(s). But it is imperative to remember that this is not just an additional way of thinking to make the work of International Relations scholars more rigorous: it implies that research starts from the lives of the excluded. Cynthia Enloe does this sort of research brilliantly, for example, asking questions about Kurdish women and Filipina maids in her analyses of the Gulf War.<sup>72</sup> But, of course, since the aim is to encourage and produce a massive amount more research from the standpoint of the excluded resistance and ignorance will be great.<sup>73</sup> To paraphrase Nancy Hirschmann, starting from the standpoint of the oppressed is an approach which is bound to be perceived by the core of International Relations as biased, partial, even perverse, and simultaneously seen as hegemonic and totalizing by the postmoderns. Yet, as she so trenchantly points out, "as long as feminists can keep both these kinds of masculinist discourses"<sup>74</sup> unhappy—even more, as long as it can keep both of them off base,

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70. Jane Flax, "The End of Innocence," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, eds. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (London: Routledge, 1992), 459.

71. Lecture by Professor R.B.J. Walker from the University of Victoria, Canada, given at the Department of International Politics, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, entitled "International Relations and Political Theory" on 7 December, 1992. The talk was based on his recent book, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

72. Enloe, "The Gendered Gulf."

73. Scanning the latest copy of the *Review of International Studies* it is sad to note that yet another scholar has joined the growing ranks of those who attempt to include "new voices," yet fail to include those of feminists. See Jan Aart Scholte, "From Power Politics to Social Change: An Alternative Focus for International Studies," *Review of International Studies* Vol. 19, No. 1, (January 1993): 3-21.

74. Realism and postmodernism.

struggling to defend and re-articulate themselves—feminists have to suspect that they are doing something right.”<sup>75</sup> One can hope that at least one contribution of feminist standpoint theory to International Relations theory is to keep those who are arrogant, self-righteous, exclusionary and elitist struggling to defend themselves.

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75. Hirschmann, *Rethinking Obligation*, 341.

