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Continuing the Conversation

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Continuing the Conversation . . .

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First, allow me to thank the editors for initiating this conversation—the first in *International Studies Quarterly*—about feminist perspectives on International Relations. I hope that these thoughtful critiques of my article and my response to them will be only the beginning of many such conversations. In the spirit of the constructive criticism evidenced in these responses, I will make three specific points about each and then draw some conclusions about the larger issues they both raise about conversations between IR scholars and feminists.

For reasons I shall elaborate below, Marianne Marchand's European perspective is particularly welcome. I agree with several of her important claims. However, I do wish to challenge the assumptions she presumes underlie my argument, thereby elaborating on some of the broader issues that her criticisms raise.

First, Marchand claims that I suggest that feminist scholars tend to work within the same ontology and epistemology. This was not my intention; indeed, I refer to a variety of feminist theoretical approaches (Tickner, 1997:620, n.21). Moreover, each of the conversational topics she cites in Spike Peterson's work is addressed in my article. What I am saying is that most IR feminist scholarship is located among the critical voices in the third debate—in interpretive or post-positivist traditions, to use Yosef Lapid's (1989) term, rather than in what I call methodologically conventional IR. I stressed this divide, and do so again, at the risk of stereotyping, because I feel it is a more fundamental one than that which divides most IR feminist approaches and because it has important consequences on which I will elaborate below. Whereas many IR scholars, particularly in the United States, view theoretical pluralism quite negatively, the fact that feminists *celebrate* differences within feminist theory (Marchand, 1998:200) is an important one to which I shall return later.

Second, Marchand points to what she sees as my underlying assumption that IR is an American discipline (Tickner, 1997:618), which means that I effectively marginalize other voices and ignore recent changes in the field (Marchand, 1998:201). This is a position I strongly disavow.¹ Writing for this journal, however, I chose to address (mainly) North American IR scholars less familiar with feminist writings. I believe that it is important for feminists to engage with this important scholarly community; otherwise those in North America risk even greater marginalization than Marchand suggests already exists.

My characterization of an "American discipline" is attributed to Stanley Hoffman who was using the term ironically. He was critically discussing U.S. scholars' commitment to social scientific methodologies, their parochialisms, and what he viewed as the negative consequences when such scholars get too close to political power. The influence of this "American discipline" is a fundamental issue which deserves further discussion both inside and outside the U.S. The hegemonic position of the post-World War II United States has gone hand in hand with a

¹ In my article I rely heavily on British authors, such as Andrew Linklater, Steve Smith, and Martin Wight, as intermediaries in these feminist/IR conversations. A similar approach is taken in Der Derian's (1995) IR theory text which includes writings of conventional and critical scholars as well as authors of the English school.

hegemonic discipline which has trained scholars throughout the world in an American worldview. Like Marchand, I too welcome recent changes that open up the discipline both to internationalization and to a multiplicity of theoretical approaches. However, in the U.S. context at least, it is questionable whether the discipline is “rapidly changing” and whether the conventional IR community no longer defines its subject matter and boundaries (Marchand, 1998:201). I doubt that IR graduate training in the most prestigious American universities today gives equal voice to articles in the European journals and scholars at European universities to which Marchand refers. Nor are teaching positions, tenure, and research funds likely to be awarded in equal measure to scholars using feminist or other critical perspectives.² Given the relative size, influence, and wealth of resources at American academic institutions, this is an issue of power as Marchand and other feminists have pointed out; *ISQ*'s decision to add a European voice to this exchange is particularly welcome in this respect.

Third, I agree with Marchand's claim that misunderstandings between feminists and other critical scholars may need different or additional explanations; certainly, not everything is reducible to culture. But this is the subject for another article, not the one I wrote. Marchand notes that, even though feminists have been largely ignored or silenced, there have been numerous debates between critical and conventional IR theorists. In the United States this would appear to be an overstatement; rather than being a genuine debate, when an exchange does take place it is more likely that conventional scholars will publish in a U.S. IR journal, sympathetic to their perspective, and a response will appear in a different journal, often outside the U.S., unlikely to be read by the same audience.³ Therefore, I especially welcome *ISQ*'s present attempt to initiate a more genuine debate.

Finally, Marchand's emphatic celebration of difference is familiar to most feminists; many support it. Her welcoming of new trends within the IR discipline—the emergence of the third debate, “internationalizing the curriculum,” and new interdisciplinary international studies programs, which she views positively, indicate that IR is moving in this direction also. But celebration of difference is troubling to many mainstream scholars who, in Kal Holsti's words, see a “discipline in disarray” and wish to promote empirical hypothesis testing within social scientific frameworks. It is over the celebration of theoretical and epistemological differences that conversation is most likely to break down. While feminists coming out of humanistic traditions of knowledge valorize difference, social scientists attempt to explain difference in particular and general terms. Consistent with Keohane's view (1998:195), the results of such comparative analyses can be used for purposes of theory development, prediction, control, and human betterment. (Reducing the likelihood of war is one such example to which Keohane refers.)

Critical perspectives often see this form of knowledge cumulation as reflecting homogenizing and manipulative tendencies of modernity which disempower or silence dissident and less powerful voices. It is for these reasons that many feminists critique Enlightenment scientific ideals and valorize difference; the extent to which Western knowledge traditions often exclude knowledge about or by women is an issue I discuss in my article. Within the variety of scholarly perspectives this is a critical epistemological divide; evidence of this tension appears even in Robert Keohane's comments, to which I turn now.

² My contention (Tickner, 1997:623) that conventional scholars are genuinely puzzled as to whether feminists are part of the same discipline and are really “doing” IR is relevant to this issue.

³ Robert Keohane's ISA presidential address (*International Studies Quarterly*, 1988) and the response by R. B. J. Walker (*Millennium*, 1989) is an example of this. They were reprinted together, however, in Der Derian, 1995.

Let me begin by complementing Robert Keohane on his understanding of gender relations and his agility in deploying feminist rhetoric against my argument. Keohane's replacement of my dichotomies with continua (Keohane, 1998:194) and his claim that the ends of these continua are not the optimal places to rest one's perspective—that a sophisticated view of science overcomes dichotomies and “forces the investigator to make interrelated choices about purposes, subject matter, and methods” (Keohane, 1998:195)—is a welcome opening to the recognition of the validity of critical perspectives. His description of late positivist or “neopositivist” scientific inquiry is a refreshing effort to take the positivist/post-positivist debate to a higher epistemological level. It is in this spirit that I critique Keohane's response, suggesting several points which I will then integrate with Marchand's.

First, in arguing for areas of agreement between critical and problem-solving theories, Keohane is proposing an “inclusive middle”; he is more inclined to deny epistemological differences than to celebrate them. While acknowledging the usefulness of certain critical work, such as that of some constructivist scholars,⁴ Keohane remains committed to an albeit broad definition of the basic method of the social sciences—formulating and testing hypotheses, making conjectures about causality, et cetera. It is precisely this epistemological orientation and many of its associated methodologies that many critical theorists and feminists critique and/or reject. A commitment to causal analysis does not acknowledge that interpretive traditions, or “understanding,” to use Hollis and Smith's (1990) term, can also be scientific. Besides devaluing much recent feminist IR, this conception of social science also devalues European IR, much of which is neither positivist nor neopositivist.⁵

Since these epistemological divides are so fundamental, an “inclusive middle” is problematic, more so than Keohane would have us believe. In the U.S. at least, where to locate oneself epistemologically or methodologically depends not only on the condition of world politics, the state of knowledge, and the nature of the problem to be investigated, as Keohane claims, but also on deeper issues of disciplinary legitimacy and career risks to which I referred earlier.⁶ Since, as I stated in my article, methodologies relevant for the construction of sophisticated interpretive analysis are not generally taught in U.S. IR graduate programs, the choice is often either not available or undertaken at considerable extra cost and effort.

Robert Cox's distinction between critical and problem-solving theory is also deeper than Keohane would have us believe. Keohane and I agree that Hans Morgenthau did not accept the prevailing order of Europe in the late 1930s. Nevertheless, Morgenthau's attempts to explain these and other forces of aggression accorded with the realist position of acknowledging certain “universal truths” about humanity and the enduring structures of the international system and then searching for generalizable laws which can better explain them. The normative goal of this theoretical endeavor is an honorable one: that by better understanding the

⁴ Interestingly in this context, Steve Smith defines social constructivism as bridging the gap between rationalist and reflectivist approaches because it speaks the language of both and is consistent with a broad conception of scientific method as Keohane suggests. Smith claims, however, that there is virtually no contact between rationalists and reflectivists, using Keohane's (1988) terms, because they do not share the same view of how to build knowledge, a position that both challenges and confirms Keohane's comments in this response (Smith, 1997:183–4).

⁵ See Patomaki, 1996, for a suggestive post-positivist, critical realist approach that searches for better explanatory stories about world politics using “interpretive depth explanations.”

⁶ Cynthia Weber (1994) raises these political/power issues in a serious, if polemical, way—as well as the issue of cooptation, as I mentioned in my article (Tickner, 1997:620, n.22).

world we can more knowledgeably try to influence it and avoid its worst aberrations, such as those of the 1930s and 1940s.⁷

Problem solving is important and necessary; few would deny this. Nevertheless, feminists and other critical theorists would want to address policy issues more critically and interpretively. A contemporary illustration of the related distinction between explanatory and interpretive theorizing⁸ can be found in the U.S. military's recent report on the investigation of widespread sexual misconduct in its ranks. As solutions to these problems, the report urges more active leadership as well as better screening and training of drill sergeants (*New York Times*, 1997). While welcoming the military's efforts to act, most feminists would claim that these problems are unlikely to go away until deeper gender hierarchies, out of which they arise, are diminished. These hierarchies are evident in somewhat extreme forms in a militarized masculinity characteristic of all or most armies as well as the society from which soldiers are drawn; they cannot be fully solved merely through better leadership selection and training. Unequal gender structures arise out of social practices deeply embedded in everyday life;⁹ ending them requires understanding how they are constructed and maintained by power structures that rely on "common sense" knowledge for their legitimation. The differences between problem solving and critical theorizing are, therefore, more fundamental than those largely methodological issues that Keohane addresses.

My third point relates to Keohane's last section on research directions. Keohane uses my suggestion, that investigating states as gendered constructs is not irrelevant to understanding their security-seeking behaviors, to propose a research program similar to that on the democratic peace. My suspicion is that such an endeavor would produce mixed results when given a conventional statistical treatment; we need richer ways of exploring such cultural and social phenomena. As I suggest in the section of my article on feminist perspectives on security, many post-positivist feminists would be unlikely to participate in such conventionally formulated research programs. Their definitions of peace often go beyond the absence of interstate war to include the diminution of both personal and structural violence as well as military conflict. Therefore, the questions they ask and the ways they go about answering them are likely to be different.

For example, in her analysis of the Gulf War, Cynthia Enloe (1993:161–200) moves from the personal to the international in her discussion of Filipino maids in prewar Kuwait as crucial players in reducing global tensions generated by the politics of international debt. Looking at the crisis from the perspectives of its least significant participants, her micro analysis of the voices of women from the U.S. and the Gulf offers a "bottom-up" or "inside-out" analysis of the politics of the war; she concludes by arguing that we cannot make sense of this war, or of world order issues more generally, without considering the politics of gender.

Inspired by Enloe's work, Katharine Moon's (1997) interviews of Korean prostitutes serving American soldiers tell how these women were drawn into the process

⁷ Cox's statements about the purposes of problem-solving theory is consistent with this position. "The general aim of problem solving is to make these [social and power] relationships and institutions [into which they are organized] work smoothly by dealing effectively with particular sources of trouble. . . . The strength of the problem-solving approach lies in its ability to fix limits or parameters to a problem area and to reduce the statement of a particular problem to a limited number of variables which are amenable to relatively close and precise examination" (Cox, 1996:88).

⁸ Cox's definition of this distinction is as follows: "Critical theory, unlike problem-solving theory, does not take institutions and social power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing. It is directed toward an appraisal of the very framework for action . . . which problem-solving theory accepts as its parameters" (Cox, 1996:88–9).

⁹ Judith Stiehm's concept of the protector/protected relationship, which I discuss in my article (Tickner, 1997:627), is one such example.

of foreign policy implementation at the highest level. She notes that a statist definition of national security is irrelevant to these women's lives and that Korea's dependent external relationship with the United States abetted its authoritarian control internally at the grass-roots level. Both these studies look for the general in the particular and rely on interpretive strategies and micro analyses to tell us something new and constitutive about war. I am not denying that research on the democratic peace is telling us something important about international relations. But, given their methodological preferences, which exist for reasons I outlined in my article, it is more likely that most IR feminists would choose an Enloe/Moon research strategy rather than the one Keohane proposes.

To conclude, Keohane ends his comments with the claim that we will only "understand" each other if IR scholars are open to the important questions that feminists raise, and if feminists are willing to formulate their hypotheses in ways that are testable—with evidence (Keohane, 1998:197). For reasons emphasized both in my article and in this response, it appears that Keohane is asking feminists to do more of the moving on his continua. It is less consequential to broaden one's research agenda to include new questions—such as the operation of military brothels or the hiring practices of Japanese multinational corporations in the U.S., and treat them in conventional comparative ways—than it is for feminists to give up epistemological positions which they believe are better suited to uncovering oppressive gender hierarchies supporting such practices. Feminists are not averse to good evidence; however, the evidence they bring to IR is frequently seen as irrelevant to its disciplinary concerns. Having offered a choice of methodological positions (Keohane, 1998:195), Keohane concludes by asking feminists to join an American "science" of which Marchand, from her European perspective, seemingly disapproves. Broadening our theoretical, epistemological, and ontological parameters, and respecting difference, which both Keohane and Marchand call for in different ways, is especially difficult. It cannot be achieved without an understanding of, and respect for, knowledge traditions now on the margins, or outside of the social sciences, traditions many feminists believe are more suited to answering the kinds of questions they ask about international politics.

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