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Yes, There are Women in International Relations: My Formative Years (and beyond) as a Feminist Scholar

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My journey towards becoming a feminist scholar has taken a somewhat unusual route. My interest in international affairs, especially working towards a more peaceful and just world, began when I was a child experiencing the bombing of London during World War II. After the war we moved to the United States where my father worked for the United Nations. I got my MA from Yale University's international relations program, an interdisciplinary one that was being phased out. Yale had an excellent political science department to which one of the three female graduate students moved (yes there were only three of us, the expectation being that we would get married and give up our careers), but it was heavily influenced by the new trend towards behavioral science. With a history degree from the University of London, and totally lacking in quantitative skills, I performed poorly in Karl Deutsch's class, so I decided that this was not the path for me. Nonetheless, I admired Deutsch greatly; he had a brilliant mind and an amazing breadth of knowledge. (I remember him once giving an impromptu lecture on the invention of Chinese water clocks). So, fulfilling the expectations of the times. I put my career on hold during my children's early years. In 1975, before I returned to graduate school, I spent a year in Geneva, Switzerland, where Johan Galtung, a leading peace researcher, was teaching a course on self-reliance as a development strategy.

The following year I returned to my graduate studies at Brandeis University to pursue a Ph.D. Galtung's ideas had a big influence on my desire to study peace and justice within the context of Third World development.¹ I also had an interest in political theory. So, I chose to write a somewhat unusual thesis, combining these two fields, by comparing the development of the early United States with post-independence India as well as the ideas of theorists who proposed different ideas as to how this should be done. I struggled to find someone at Brandeis who was willing to be my dissertation supervisor, but I was very fortunate that Robert Keohane came to Brandeis for a few years prior to his move to Harvard. Keohane was intrigued by my proposal and was willing to take me on. He was very supportive of my thesis work, as he has been throughout my career. I owe gratitude to the late Susan Okin, a leading feminist political theorist, who joined my dissertation committee. Even though this was before I began my journey towards feminist theory, Okin's work started me down that path. Her book *Women and Western Political Thought*, published in 1979, details the history of the perceptions of women in western political philosophy, a sub-field of political science that was well ahead of IR in addressing gender issues.² The third member

¹ See Johan Galtung, Peter O'Brien and Roy Preiswerk, eds. *Self-Reliance: A Strategy for Development* (London: Bogle-l'Ouverture, 1980). Galtung's concept, structural violence, also influenced my thinking. See Johan Galtung, "A Structural Theory of Imperialism," *Journal of Peace Research* 8:2 (1971): 81-117.

² Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

of my committee, Thomas Biersteker had just written a book on Tanzania as a model of self-reliant development.³ Tom, and my late husband Hayward Alker worked together throughout their careers until Hayward's untimely death: both continued to support and influence my thinking throughout my career. Hayward was an intellectual partner as well as a life partner, although I could never have matched his brilliance.

My dissertation began with a chapter examining the self-reliant development model advocated by Jean Jacques Rousseau in his Project for Corsica. I then compared Mahatma Gandhi's thinking on self-reliant development with that of Jawaharlal Nehru and, for the U.S. case, the ideas of the early Thomas Jefferson with those of Alexander Hamilton and Frederick List. I did skim all hundred volumes of Gandhi's collected works (he even had instructions for his family on how to brush their teeth). Like Rousseau, both Gandhi and the early Jefferson advocated self-reliance, societies built around small rural communities that would satisfy individuals' basic needs. Nehru, Hamilton, and List favored building national power over basic needs through industrialization, protectionism and isolation from the global economy while the U.S. and India were building their manufacturing capabilities. I demonstrated that in both cases building national power won out over agrarian self-reliance. My dissertation was published by Columbia University Press, entitled *Self-Reliance Versus Power Politics: American and Indian Experiences in Building Nation States*.⁴ Apart from a couple of articles, I never published anything else on this topic.

My first job was at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, MA, where, being a student of Keohane's, I was hired to teach international political economy. Holy Cross was a great place for someone like me who was always outside the mainstream as the political science department was very tolerant of non-traditional research, as long as you did it well. But it was my experience with teaching there that led me to IR feminist theory, the field in which I have published and taught ever since.

When I received my Ph.D. in 1984, there was almost no feminism in IR. I began my teaching career during the Cold War and any introductory IR course required a heavy dose of strategic theory. I began to notice that many of my female students felt profoundly disempowered and disinterested in this material, fearing they would not do well in the course. I remember male students whom I secretly called *weapons experts* who sat in the front row and delighted (as did I) in discussing probability of kill ratios depending on the number of nuclear missiles aimed at a given target. (This was before Carol Cohn did her brilliant work analyzing the masculinity of the language of defense experts).⁵ Like my intimidated female students, I slowly began to see IR as a male centered field, focused on war, strategic thinking and power politics. We read Hans Morgenthau's *Politics among Nations* and focused heavily on realism, the dominant paradigm at the time.⁶ I often wondered where the people were amid all those billiard balls clashing in a dangerous anarchic international system. Since I took for granted that the 'great men' of the field were indeed all men, it took me a while to realize that there were very few women authors I could assign, or even thought of assigning, to my students. And I felt very alone and out of place at professional meetings as there were few women in the field in the mid-1980s.

About this time, I happened to read a book by physicist Evelyn Fox Keller entitled *Reflections on Gender and Science* in which she claimed that the natural sciences were profoundly gendered both in the questions they asked and the way they

³ Thomas Biersteker, *Distortion or Development? Contending Perspectives on the Multinational Corporation* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1978).

⁴ J. Ann Tickner, *Self-Reliance versus Power Politics: American and Indian Experiences in Building Nation States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

⁵ Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 12:4 (Summer 1987): 687-718.

⁶ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1973).

went about answering them.⁷ In another book, *A Feeling for the Organism*, Keller described the life and work of biologist Barbara McClintock who, in 1983, having previously been denied a professorship at Cornell because she was a woman, was awarded the Nobel Prize in medicine for her work on the transposition of corn.⁸ Shunned by her fellow biologists who regarded her work as either too radical or not important, McClintock described her research methodology as listening the corn to hear what it had to tell her. Although she never described herself as a feminist, it was not until I started writing about feminist methodology, that it occurred to me that McClintock's methods were remarkably similar to those of many feminist IR theorists. Exploring further in the philosophy of science, mostly importantly work by Sandra Harding, I began to see that Harding's and Keller's claims about the masculinity of science could also be made about IR theory.⁹ Since there was nothing in IR feminist theory in the late 1980s, both Keller and Harding strongly influenced my early explorations of IR feminist theory: one of the important exceptions to the lack of feminist work at that time, was Cynthia Enloe who published *Does Khaki Become You?* in 1983.¹⁰ Although I must admit that I had not yet discovered Enloe's work, she, along with other *first generation* feminists, such as Spike Peterson, Anne Runyan, Christine Sylvester and Carol Cohn, were early co-collaborators in my feminist journey; all have influenced my thinking in numerous ways.¹¹

My first published piece in feminist theory was an article I wrote in 1988 critiquing Hans Morgenthau's six principles of political realism.¹² *Political man* was indeed a man; I did not claim that Morgenthau's portrayal of the behavior of *political man* was incorrect; just that it was partial and based only on behavior that we associate with masculinity. 1988 was an important year in my emergence as a feminist scholar. I was invited to what I believe was the first IR feminist conference that took place at the London School of Economics. Papers from that meeting, including my Morgenthau piece, were published in a special issue of *Millennium*. In the same year, together with the late Fred Halliday, I was invited to co-teach an MA course at the LSE entitled, "Women and International Relations." Halliday, a Middle East specialist, took the courageous step of introducing this course into the LSE curriculum. I say "courageous" because teaching and writing about women and gender was a risk to one's career, particularly for men. At that point there was so little we could assign to the students that we relied heavily on guest speakers, mostly policymakers and activists who were working on women's issues, many of them dealing with development.

Although it was not obvious at the time, reflecting on my gradual emergence as a feminist scholar, almost forty years later, I have begun to see a connection between my dissertation research and my subsequent writings, something I never thought about at the time.¹³ As I mentioned earlier, my dissertation presented two models of self-reliant development, building national power, versus satisfying peoples' basic needs. I now see these models as profoundly gendered. The Hamiltonian

⁷ Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁸ Fox Keller, *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1983).

⁹ Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives* (Boston: South End Press, 1983).

¹¹ See for some examples, V. Spike Peterson, ed., *Gendered States: Feminist Revisions of International Relations Theory* (Boulder: Lynne Reiner, 1992). This volume contains chapters by many of the early IR feminists. Christine Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹² J. Ann Tickner, "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 17:3 (1988): 429-440.

¹³ This connection is explored in some detail in Tickner, "Rethinking the State in International Relations: A Personal Reflection," chapter 2 in Swati Parashar, J. Ann Tickner, and Jacqui True, eds., *Revisiting Gendered States: Feminist Imaginings of the State in International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

model advocated building national strength and industrialization at the expense of the basic needs of individuals. The early Jefferson, before he became U.S. president, advocated that America should be composed of rural communities of small-scale farmers with land distributed as widely as possible. Of course, the Jeffersonian model applied only to white men and the *empty land* as he described it, was in reality already occupied by native peoples. Nevertheless, in spite of its racist and sexist limitations, IR feminists, writing about development and state building have advocated the same kind of basic needs strategy that supports bottom up development and the importance of satisfying peoples' basic needs. However, like many western thinkers of the time, Jefferson was a liberal individualist who believed in the autonomous self-reliant individual. Feminist thinking has been strongly critical of liberal individualism. "Economic man" is just that; a rationalist autonomous individual whose behavior is calculated around his own interests. Rationality and autonomy are masculine characteristics; in western thinking these have been thought of as characteristics that women do not possess. Feminists have also been critical of the western liberal state, seeing it as a unitary actor displaying similar masculine characteristics with its emphasis on maximizing autonomy and power, (the Hamiltonian model) in an effort to ensure national, over individual, security. Nehru advocated this path as well.

The Gandhian model, however, is more consistent with certain feminist development strategies. Gandhi advocated for women's equality and his development strategy emphasized the community over the individual. Gandhi saw the state as responsible only for certain tasks that could not be carried out at the local level; in other words, a bottom-up strategy that has been favored by feminists. I have addressed all of these topics in my later writings and I find it quite remarkable how many of these ideas are consistent with my own thinking on self-reliant development that I addressed in my Ph.D. dissertation.

So how has my thinking changed over the last thirty years? Reflecting on my early work, around the time I wrote the Morgenthau piece, I used the words *women* and *men*, without thinking much about race, class, geographical location, and the fluidity of gender identities. The work of Black feminist and post-colonial scholars has a lot to tell us about which women are relatively privileged and which are oppressed.¹⁴ I have also thought a lot more about agency. It is vital that we not see women only as victims; all women have agency in spite of their victimization, and they are fighting against their own oppressions, not waiting for *us* to help *them*. But there is a dilemma here that I have struggled with when trying to speak in a language that the mainstream IR will accept. Thirty years ago, just introducing the terms *women* and *gender* into the discipline was considered radical; indeed, as I have stated earlier, I began my own IR training without ever having thought about women or about their absence from IR. I have thought more about gender which, of course, does not just apply to women: since IR has been heavily populated by men, masculinity is itself an important topic, even though gender is still often thought of as applying only to women.

I puzzled for long time over why women and gender have been so resisted by the discipline: slowly, I came to an understanding that, in the U.S. at least, acceptable research is as much about methodology as it is about subject matter. Gender is a social construction that cannot be understood using positivist methodologies and hypothesis testing. There are feminist IR scholars who do use mainstream methodologies and they have been much more successful in getting their work published in top U.S. journals.¹⁵ I have written a great deal about this lack of understanding and the need for acceptance of post-positivist methodologies.

¹⁴ Patricia Hill Collins, "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14:4 (Summer 1989): 745-773; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

¹⁵ See for examples, Mary Caprioli and Mark Boyer, "Gender, Violence and International Crisis" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45:4 (2001):503-518. Valerie Hudson, Mary Caprioli, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Rose McDermott, and Chad E. Emmett, "The Heart of the Matter: The Security of Women and the Security of States," *International Security* 33:3 (2008/2009): 7-45.

More recently, I have been searching for what I call *hidden voices* in IR, the stories of those who were colonized by European powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I have explored the voices of indigenous peoples who have a lot to tell us about better ways to order our world. Most recently, I have come full circle back to my undergraduate training in history, albeit a very different kind of history. Until feminist historians began looking for women, women had been completely left out of history as we used to learn it and it certainly never occurred to me during my undergraduate training to expect to find any women apart from the occasional queen. The hundredth anniversary of World War I produced a flurry of publications, mostly written by men, prompted me to go back and look at what women were doing at the time. I discovered that in 1915, European and American women from both sides of that conflict came together in The Hague, Netherlands and devised a set of principles to ensure a just peace. Although their ideas were dismissed at the time, as silly or impractical, many of them were enshrined in President Wilson's Fourteen Points and the Covenant of the League of Nations, although the women were never cited or given credit.¹⁶

In conclusion, feminist IR is thriving, with exciting and varied contributions being made by women (and men) from all over the world on topics such as gender-based violence, sex work, human rights, women in the military, women in conflict and post-conflict reconstruction and women as peacemakers. In the short span of thirty plus years, feminist IR has become a recognized sub-discipline of the field. Its acceptance is still mixed, however; it does better in places not driven by methodological conformity. In the U.S. in the 1990s, there was an opening towards greater tolerance for postpositive methodologies and more acceptance of a wider variety of topics that were considered part of IR. Sadly, since 9/11, there has been a narrowing, a greater focus on traditional security topics. Along with it, there has been a return to methodological conformity at least in major research universities. But as the field has narrowed, IR feminism has broadened its reach, geographically, methodologically and in terms of its subject matter. I was fortunate to find an intellectual home where I was comfortable and could make a contribution. I owe a huge debt to all those scholars who have helped me along my intellectual path, both before and during my feminist years.

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¹⁶ Jane Addams, Emily G. Balch and Alice Hamilton, *Women at The Hague* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2003).