



Gender and Security in International Relations: Understanding Narrative Approach to Security

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ABSTRACT: The article critically analyses the concept of security in the discipline of International Relations. With the focus on war and states, the idea of security has become oblivious of how force and organised violence along with security policies affect bodies. With the aim to demystify certain foundational assumption of the security discourse, the article uses gender as a categorical variable while analysing security. By applying gender lens to the idea of security, it tries to understand the growing militarisation of security in the discourse of security. The article proposes that a gender lens be used to understand and evaluate the security policies so that the comprehensive impact of 'security policies' on 'bodies' (individuals) can be comprehensively understood. In this context, the article notes importance of 'a narrative approach to security' to have a more comprehensive understanding of the implications of security policies.

KEYWORDS: Security, International Relations, Gender, Militarisation, Narrative Approach



1. INTRODUCTION

Security is one of the core concepts in the discipline of International Relations (IR). Security is a contested term as there are no single accepted definition of security in IR. With the focus on war and states, the idea of security has become oblivious of how force and organised violence along with security policies affect bodies. Dominantly the parameter for peace has been the absence of war. Such a structure has led to the build-up of the military institution for the maintenance of security. International security with its concern for state and avoidance of war has distanced from the idea of gender. The presence of gender hierarchies in the form of masculine practices has either been unnoticed or normalised within the international relations. In its broadest sense 'security' refers to be 'secured', 'protected' from threats and vulnerabilities. The security discourse further fosters the centrality of the states within the discipline of international relations. With several theoretical interventions within the discourse of security in IR, there has been a certain widening of the scope of the discourse. However, the centrality of the state remains because state is considered as the sole security provider in IR. The state protection is a two-pronged instrument – on one hand, it gives the state the legitimacy 'to use force in the name of protection', and on the other, 'protection' comes in return for the 'submission and obedience from the protected'. Thus, the state's protection has been built on the bargain for autonomy and obedience.

State protection is directly related to the building up the institution of military in the state. This also leads to the importance of military in state as a state instrument for protection. Besides giving up one's autonomy for protection, the state's protection is also built upon the principle of masculinist protection. Moreover, the militarised masculinities which dominates security discourse goes unrecognised in IR because of the discipline's urge to be scientific and gender neutral. The gendered construction of security and the idea of protection has also led to the sustenance of the gendered hierarchy between the protectors and the protected. The idea of state protection has been often labelled as a 'myth' because the protection racket of the state legitimises the violence and use of force as a means of protection.

With the aim to demystify certain foundational assumptions of the security discourse, the article uses gender as a categorical variable while analysing security. By applying gender lens to the idea of security, it tries to understand the growing militarisation of security in the discourse of security. The article argues that the discourse of security is essentially based on state's security and protection which leads to the idea of 'protection racket' which legitimises the use of militarised violence by the state. The article proposes that a gender lens be used to understand and evaluate the security policies so that the comprehensive affect of 'security policies' on 'bodies' (individuals) can be comprehensively understood. In this context, the article notes importance of 'a narrative approach to security' to have a more comprehensive understanding of the implications of security policies.

2. Conceptualising Security

The idea of security is one of the foundational concepts of the IR, but it is one of the most contested ideas in the discipline. This can be attributed to the fact that there is no single accepted definition for the concept. It is important that a power-laden concept like security is comprehensively defined. Security allows and justifies the state's use violence. The discourse is mainly focused on the ways and means to secure the state from external threats and vulnerabilities. Freedman (1998) has elaborated the concerns of the security discourse to the idea of force and how the state has to control and eliminate the external threats through the use of force and organised violence. Freedman (1998) pointed out how security is concerned with the idea of force and various ways force has to be spotted and stopped along with managing military activities to encourage or discourage organised violence. Scholars like Freedman (1998) and Walt (1991) are a concern with limiting the discourse so that the cause of security is not lost. The failure to have an agreed list of security threats and vulnerabilities has enabled to sustain such a short-sighted nature of the discourse of security. Different theoretical perspectives have a different outlook of security and certain ideas dominate over others because it suits the state's interest.

2.1 Traditional Conceptualisation of Security

The security discourse within the discipline has been associated with the realist tradition within the

discipline which has seen the idea of the state central to the idea of security. The discourse of security can be traditionally seen from the perspective of the states which focused on war and peace and how state organises violence to deal with its insecurity. Classical realism view states as a rational unitary actor. The neo-realist tradition within the discipline views states as a rational actor who is intertwined with the level of analysis decisions. The traditional scholarships which focussed on the realist understanding of security can be 'conceptualised as the study of threat, use and control of military force' (Walt 1991). Realist scholars perceive the state as the referent object of security, and thus it is concerned with avoidance of war. The Realist theories of International Relations views as Baldwin (1993: 4) has examined the world order as 'a system of competing self-interested state actors under anarchy'. It is significant to investigate the world order to understand how security perceives anarchy. Realists believe that the idea of security which involves the state's pursuance of power which is guided by the national interests and is rarely affected by moral deliberations (Morgenthau 1978). Realism necessarily does not see that the states are aggressive but believe that there is a sense of threat in the international relations which is dominated by idea of anarchical structure of international system which leads to insecurity among the states (Waltz 1959). The neo-realist scholars perceive that there can be use of force by the state to attain its goal under the international structure of anarchy (Waltz 1979).

Neo-realists like Waltz (1979) view the international relations to be anarchical in the sense there is no supreme authority over the states and states are thus responsible for maintaining their security. The realist theoretical perspective in international relations privileges on war and security rather than the individuals. Their conceptualisation of security is rather limited to the state's security and an absence of war. The way the conventional theories of international relations try to define the concept of 'security' is not comprehensive enough in the way international relations is transforming with the change in the nature of war and the way peace is sought. It is very significant to define the idea of security comprehensively. It is important that the powerful concepts like security are adequately defined. Buzan (1983) argues that 'if politically powerful concepts like national security are weakly define, then there

will be increasing scope for power maximising strategies by political and military elites because of their leverage over domestic affairs'.

Although, both the liberal theories and the social constructivist theories believe that state is one of the important actors within the international relations. They differ from the realist strand from the way that they look at the anarchical structure of the international system. The liberal theorists also believe in the anarchy in international politics, but differ from the realist scholars on the outcome from the anarchy. They point out that anarchy does not necessarily lead to state aggression as different international institutions check it. The social constructivists like Wendt (1992) do not question the centrality of states but argue that anarchy does not necessarily leads to conflict within international relations. The constructivist strand believe that the result of anarchy is not conflictual as the realist perceive. The state response to the anarchical structure in the way they are normalised to practice. The traditional theories have given a state centric analysis of the idea of security. Though these theories paint different picture of international relations, states still have been central to their conception of security within international relations.

2.2 Broadening and Deepening of Security

Different scholars have challenged the centrality of states in the traditional understanding of security. Ullman (1983) notes the fabrication of the idea of reality by concentrating only on the proficiency of military in the discourse of security. Ullman (1983) further argues that by over emphasising the idea of military and national security, the total security of the states is reduced whereby by leading to global insecurity. Buzan (1983) coined the idea of 'referent object' in the discourse of security, and he believed that the notion of security should move beyond the idea of national security. He notes the centrality of individuals within the security discourse by labelling individuals as 'the irreducible basic unit' (Buzan1983). This was followed by the broadening and deepening of the discourse. Broadening refers to increasing the referent objects of security and dismantling a state as the only referent object of security. By deepening it tried to bring more actors within security to move ahead of the state centric idea of security. The broadening and deepening of security

have led to blurring between the high politics and low politics which divided the security discourse.

Buzan called for the expansion of the concept of security to include individual security, national security and international security along with economic security, the political security and the environmental security (Buzan and Hansen 2009:154). With the call for the widening and deepening of the concept, different notions of security like “common security” and “comprehensive security” was developed (Buzan and Hansen 2009: 136). Common security has assumed “the main threats to international security does not only come from individual states but from the global issues like nuclear war, economic concerns, global poverty and others which is common to the international community” (Buzan and Hansen 2009: 136). When the idea of common security pointed out that there are common threats shares by international community, the idea of comprehensive security has broadened the discourse of security. By retaining the idea of military security within the discourse, comprehensive security widened the discourse by including economic, political and environmental concerns within the security discourse.

The widening and deepening of the concept of security was further done by the Copenhagen School within international security which conceptualised the idea of societal security and securitisation. Wæver et al. (1993: 23) defined societal security as “the ability of the society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or actual threats”. The idea of state was already there, but the idea of societal security puts the idea of society along with state as the referent object. While the state was the referent object for “political, military, environmental and economic security, it was ‘society’ that constituted the referent object for societal security” (Wæver et al., 1993: 26). Another idea which helped in understanding the close relationship between security and the state which is the concept of securitisation. The concept of securitisation refers precisely to the process of presenting an issue in security and an existential threat. The idea of securitisation refers to the discursive power of security which legitimises the means through which a security issue is dealt with. By framing certain issues as a security issue, states are enabled to use special kind of politics. The discursive power of security brings together security actors and security objects. Buzan (1983) has defined securitising

actors as those who securitise issues by declaring existentially threatened; and referent object as the actors which can be seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival.

2.3 Gendering the notion of Security

With all the attempts to widen the discourse, the idea of gender and its concerns were still missing within the security discourse. Hansen (2000) explained how the idea of securitisation and societal security has been developed in way that they have missed out on the idea of gender. The omission of gender is often conflated with the need of the discipline to be gender neutral. The gender blindness of the discourse has led to the prevalence and sustenance of masculinity within the security discourse and in the discipline of IR. The feminist scholars within the field have called for the re-defining the idea of security through addressing concerns of gender.

The feminist security scholars challenge the mainstream idea of security by exploring the link between gender and security. The feminist security studies have critically analysed the security discourse and the absence of gendered consideration within the discourse. The feminist security scholars emphasise the masculine practices by the ‘manly’ states (Hooper 2001). They look at the presence of militarised masculinity within the security discourse and links the masculine nature of security with the violent practices within international relations.

Feminist security scholars urge to include ‘women’ and ‘gender’ as the referent object in the conceptualising security. They argue that women are disproportionately impacted by the security policies and state practices. Although, women are not inherently peaceful or necessarily more likely to die, but they are threatened in other ways than men which are missed by security discourse. The insecurities of women are not only limited to military-centric state security but can be also linked to malnutrition, poor quality of health care, environmental hazards and poverty. They also look at the idea of security as a multi-dimensional concept and try to enrich the notion of security in many ways. Feminist security scholars also point out the non-existence of women and criticise the relationship between peace and woman. They note how women support, participate and inspire war making.

The concept of security has thus moved ahead of the state centric conception of security by merging both the high politics and low politics. The security discourse has widened to include the environmental concerns and ideas of human security, but has still been ignorant to the ideas of gender. Viewing gender as a constitutive category within the discourse of security. The absence of gender brought out the absence or selective ousting of bodies within security discourse. The security discourse has kept itself away from the concern of security and embodied subjects which the feminist theorists concern themselves with.

3. Militarised Masculinity and the Myth of Protection

In the above sections, the article notes the close link between the institution of military and security. The institution of military is also gendered in a way that it is often seen to closely associate with privileging the masculine traits of strength, courage to protect the vulnerable civilians. Militarised masculinity can be understood as refers to the assertion that traits stereotypically associated with masculinity can be acquired and proven through military service or action, and combat. The state and military leaders display strength using military force or recruit male citizens through appeals to their masculine identity, thus, relying and reproducing militarised masculinity (Eichler, 2014). Militarized masculinity is a form of hegemonic masculinity as defined by Kronsell and Svedverg (2012). Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant form of masculinity that seeks to establish and maintain a widespread social dominance over others, including women, children, and less dominant men. Militarised masculinity is also associated with the activities like combat which are generally considered to be a male centric. Men are hence seen as the protector or perpetrator of the weak and vulnerable females. The concept of militarised masculinity sustains militarism within security discourse which provides the legitimacy of the state using violence.

Tilly (1985) further notes how the idea of protection legitimises the state's image of security provider. He conceptualises the idea of protection as a 'racket' which refers to how the state maintains and uphold the military as a security provider for the people. The nexus between the state and the military has retained the protection racket of the state. Tilly (1985) has pointed out how state maintains its legitimacy based

on the idea of protection. The state promises protection to its population and for which it has a free ride to use violence.

The protection racket of the state while legitimising the militarism along with normalising the gendered hierarchy between the protector and the protected. Under this racket it is the women who are seen as the vulnerable population in need of the protection of the military men. The protection racket sustains under the principle that women are promised protection from wars and other security policies by the manly state who take credit whether they are doing so or not. Theoretically speaking, the masculinity protects the femininity whether men protect women in real material terms. The need for women to be protected forms the justification for the wars and other policies of the state.

Tickner (2001) calls this protection racket or the idea that wars are fought to protect women and children as 'myth'. By looking at the high degree civilian casualties of war, one could question how secured are the civilians under security policies. A micro level analysis of war can point out how secure are people under the discourse of security. The examination of the impact of war on vulnerable populations, including women and children, provides valuable insight into the unequal gender relations that perpetuate military activities can be observed. Further, it can also point out that the activity of war is a cultural construction which is established on the notion of myth of protection. In a sense, masculinity could be seen as the ultimate protector. This is a kind of social practice or a cultural construction that reflects masculinity, aggression and valour as a support to the war. There is a logic of masculinist protection which sustains the state-centric idea of protection which is formed on militarised masculinity. Young (2003) pointed out that central to the logic of the masculinist protection is based on the subordination of those who constitute the protected realms. The result of masculinist protection distances women from the decision-making autonomy. The relation between the state and its citizens is based on the logic of masculinist protection.

The narratives of wars, genocide or anything which is the result of security policies brings out the logic of masculinist protection. Men derive honour from protecting women and their honour. Gender hierarchy in the theory and practice of international relations

which elaborates how wars are fought in the name of saving women and the lives of the women. States go to war to protect their citizens from external threats. The state is seen as the protector of the vulnerable citizens who mostly consists of the women. International Relations is structured in such a way that gender concerns are kept away from the discipline. The result is that discipline tries to be gender neutral which leads to the binary between the masculine and feminine. The masculine is privileged over the feminine. To critically examine the existing myth of protection, it is important to approach the discourse of security and protection through narrative approach.

4. Narrative Approach to Security

From the above discussion, it could be seen that the internal logic of state as the masculine protector justifies the aggressive nature of security discourse. It is important that a ground level and a micro level analysis of security policies is carried out for a comprehensive understanding. In this context, narrative approach is an essential approach for a comprehensive understanding of security policies. Narratives are fundamental way by which anyone can make sense of the world, produce meanings, articulate intentions and legitimate actions (Wibben, 2011). Narratives in this sense help in making sense of any event. The world is accessible through interpreting and narrating stories of experiences and thus it shapes the world. Polkinghorne (1988) similarly argues it is the narratives that makes events comprehensible by identifying the individual occurring and their overall effect. The narratives bring out the importance of individual experiences in the holistic understanding of any event.

The framing of an event through a particular narrative also has certain significance. Wibben (2011) accordingly argues that narratives is inclusionary and exclusionary in the way while framing an event, certain opinions and actors are included and some are excluded. By examining narratives one can also point out individual experiences, their complex subject positions and allegiances which is also the result of the intersection of the different identities-class, gender, race and others of an individual. Looking at the experience as narrative points out to the interpretative aspect of the collection of experience. The narrative approach to security allows the conceptualising of security as practice. Williams (1998:439, cited in

Wibben, 2011) point out that “the conceptualisation of security as practice allows for asking several questions: questions on the relationship of theory to practice; regarding the constitutive place of particular forms of knowledge and conceptions of identity in the political constitution of modern societies”. Such an effort will allow scholars for looking at the ways how there has been omission of any broadening of security under the traditional security studies. Examining security narratives can help the discipline in understanding how individuals think about security and who are the people whose security matters and what can be the different ways security can be achieved. The traditional security narrative is focusing too much on the states which have made it difficult to think security from the perspective of women who are variously located and their insecurities raising from several intersectionalities. The meaning of security is ambiguous because there is no single agreed meaning of the concept of security. The vagueness of security is helpful for the governments who invoke security as it allows them to frame any issue regarding security which requires extraordinary response. The narrative approach of security draws attention to how subjects and meanings are constructed and generated. Narrative theory moves beyond the distinction between theory and practice and seeks to investigate how narratives frame and construct acts and events. Such an approach to security means interpreting security practices using the meaning of security which means “the signifying and ordering work of security practices” (Huysmans, 1998:233). The dominant approaches of IR leave out many critical questions while looking at the security for they prioritised certain elements – “threats locating danger, referents to be secured, agents to provide security and means to contain danger” (Wibben 2011:66). Accordingly, Wibben (2011) notes security should be seen as practice for “it has the performative force, and they organise social relations, security narratives constitute the subjects with discernible identities which possess characteristics, interests, responsibilities ad histories” (Dillon, 1990: 101). The narratives of security privileges particular dangers over others because of their authoritative nature. The instances of authoritative narratives can be the foreign policies of any country. Such narratives conform to and confirm the economic, social, symbolic and political order. The authoritative narrative describes events which are conducive to the established social order. This whole process is gendered because of the

whole gendered nature of the pre-established social order. Thus, it is important to ask as to which narratives become the security narratives and how they function.

The narratives of security clarify as to who and what is secured and who are seen to be unsecured. The problem with the traditional security narrative is that it privileges the states which rarely question the narrow conception of the security conceptualisation. It becomes necessary that an alternative understanding of security is considered to displace the centrality of states in IR. The traditional security narrative is based on the idea of security as a practice which builds on the prevailing social order keeping the unequal social structure in place. The alternative understanding of security thus should consider the construction of gender within the state's social order. Approaching security as narrative changes the way anyone views what one sees and what security means.

The importance of the narrative approach is that the personal narrative is explicitly acknowledged rather than ironed out as it is done within the traditional security studies. A security narrative is a bottom-up approach which helps to investigate the impact of security policies like the war on women as often war and violence carried out is justified to secure the women and children, who are seen to be vulnerable. The concept of security as narrative questions the idea that wars are fought to protect the vulnerable populations. Narratives of war and violence can point out how the security policies can also lead to insecurity among its population. The security policies are based on the promise of protection in return for subordination and obedience. Also, the security policies are gendered in a way that there is a hierarchy among the male protectors and the female protected. The protection racket of the state or the idea of the myth of protection refers to the masculinist protectionism which dominates the security policies leading to insecurity among people especially women.

5. Conclusion

The article has looked at the idea and practice of security within international relations using a gender lens to understand how the discourse of international security maintains gendered hierarchy. For this purpose, it has sought to understand the growing militarisation of security discourse and how the idea of security has become synonymous with militarised

masculinity. The article argues that the idea of security has fundamentally centralised the institution of the military which is based on the practice of masculinity. The practice of militarised masculinity allows for the centrality of state and its security over everything and resist any changes in the name of diluting the cause of security. The practice of militarism believes in the military answer for any security problem and legitimises the use of violence by the state. A gendered analysis problematises such practices within the security discourse by allowing to widen the discourse to analyse how security discourse is itself shaped by the gendered structure of hierarchy. There has been a recognition of the vulnerability of women during conflict and how it is important to include women during conflict resolution by the United Nations. However, the discipline has to move ahead of 'adding and stirring women' in the name of gender mainstreaming. The article argues that the absence of women within the field of IR should not be the only concern of a gendered based analyses. Rather the way the discourse shapes and practises has to be problematised. The problem of militarised masculinity requires detaching both the idea of masculinity from militarism and militarism from masculinity. There requires a restructuring of the normative ways that the idea of militarism and masculinity has been defined and shaped. Gender is a social and cultural determined identity which may or may not correspond to actual men and women. A gendered lens in analysing security brings out the subtle ways that the security discourse maintains and practice masculinity. The militarised masculinity fosters a patriarchal structure within the discipline and allows the state to define security in a way that suits its interest. A bottom-up approach points out how secured embodied subjects are under the security policies.

The article shows that with the practice of militarised masculinity has allowed the discourse to be short-sighted to the plight of embodied subjects who are adversely affected by the security practices. By depending on a particular narrative which satisfies the interest of the state, the security policies are sustained. Rather, the article argues that the idea of security should be seen from a narrative approach. Such an approach allows to look at various narratives while looking and analysing the practice of security. The vulnerable position of women can be seen through the structural position of women and how they face

different kinds of violence which the security discourse has considered at the periphery. A narrative approach to security is important in broadening the scope of security including the already marginalised women.

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