The Protection Paradox: Why Security's Focus on the State Is Not Enough

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Our understanding of security requires a critical shift away from the traditional security paradigm that focuses on military threats to the state. This shift has been contemplated by constructivists, queer scholars, post-colonialists and environmentalists, to name a few. This essay will employ feminist security studies to explore the need to move security away from its realist origins. The invisibility of women in security studies, both in theory and practice, has resulted in an androcentric discipline that cannot adequately address real-world events (Sjoberg, 2009). Instead, the discipline is characterised by what some call "the protection paradox", which means that security studies and its traditional actors, the military and the state, often fail to protect those it promises to. As Laura Sjoberg (2009:198) writes, "secure states often contain insecure women", an observation that gets to the core of my argument. This essay will discuss why this occurs and why the discipline needs to be broadened.

My argument is structured around three key points, linked to the protection paradox idea and driven by the feminist conviction of looking for women in security situations. First, I will examine the impact of socially constructed dichotomies upon security studies. Next, I will move on to my argument that not all forms of security are physical or state-based. Finally, this essay will examine the relationship between intersectional feminism and security. Through these three key points, I hope to clarify that security needs to be reconceptualised, away from military threats and towards a discipline that acknowledges women in all aspects of security.

Before moving on to the body of my analysis, I will briefly outline the context behind this debate, including the development of Feminist Security Studies (FSS). The discipline of Security Studies came into being after World War II and was dominated by realist thinking until the end of the 20th century, when its traditional focus centred around the "state, strategy, science and status quo" (Williams and McDonald, 2018: 3). The international system was seen as a "brutal arena" in which states sought to secure themselves, sometimes at the expense of their neighbours (Lin, 2011: 8). This traditional realist paradigm assumes that if a state is secure, then so too are the people who live in it (Lin, 2011: 12). However, after the Cold War, discontent with the realist foundations of the discipline began to emerge. This debate became increasingly important following 9/11, an event that many academics, policy advisors and journalists could not explain using traditional realist security thinking.

The discipline of security studies then evolved to include a range of theories, both traditional and critical. The likes of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wild argue that security requires theoretical and practical broadening to cover threats beyond the traditional military and state domains (Lin, 2011: 14). This includes the now well-developed canon of feminist thinking.

Feminist security studies is led by scholars such as Cynthia Enloe, Jean Elshtain, Laure Sjoberg, Spike Peterson and Ann Tickner (Smith, 2005). Although there are different schools of thought, including liberal, constructivist, post-structuralist and postcolonial feminism, each with a slightly different approach, different methodologies and different solutions, they all share common ideas (Williams, 2017). By asking "where are the women?", feminists highlight that by ignoring women in security we distort our understanding and hinder our ability to solve security challenges (Enloe, 2014). In this way, feminist security studies is "ultimately destabilising" and my three key arguments aim to reflect this (Smith, 2005: 46). Against this contextual backdrop, I will now move on to the main body of this essay.

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Gender dichotomies in Security Studies

First, traditional security studies require a conceptual shift because it is constructed around a dichotomy of public versus private. This dichotomy is gender- aligned and, as such, has a significant impact on how the state is constructed and on the paradoxical nature of how the state conducts security.

Jacqui True (1996) points out that women are placed within the "inside, privative dimension'" where their actions, their opinions and their risk of insecurity are made invisible (True, 1996: 229-30). When we look at women in conflicts, it immediately becomes clear that insecurity permeates places not usually considered in security studies, such as homes, bedrooms, schools, hotels, etc (Sjoberg, 2015). However, the narrow focus of security studies conceals this by prioritising public spheres and the masculinised activities within them, such as international warfare (Peterson, 2004). These gendered dichotomies create the "protection paradox" – states that fail to protect (at best) and endanger (at worst) individuals. Therefore, state centric security and its focus on the public sphere overlooks the individual by creating blind spots in their protection and in the pursuit of human rights.

To illustrate this, I will use the example of Turkey. In Elif Babul's (2015) paper, entitled 'The Paradox of Protection', she explains how, as a consequence of dichotomies that place women (and children) in the private sphere, they are treated as "appreciative subjects of their benevolent protectors" rather than lawful right bearers (Babul, 2015: 117). Babul (2015) argues that, in Turkey, this idea of "trading [freedoms] for protection" has placed women and children at the mercy of the state (Young, 2003, p. 16). For instance, Turkish state officials have been involved in major human rights violations against women and, according to a 2012 report, 46 Turkish children were killed in events either committed by state officials or caused by their neglect (Babul, 2015: 117). These examples illuminate the crucial need to move security studies away from military threats to states and towards an individual focus.

Beyond traditional forms of violence

This idea of an individual focus leads me to my second point. Looking at security from the perspective of individuals (especially women) rather than the state, reveals that not all violence is physical and state-based. Women experience violence in different ways to the traditional understanding of state and military violence. Many feminist security academics define security in "multidimensional and multilevel" terms, covering all forms of violence from physical, to structural, to ecological (Tickner, 1997: 621). They argue that for women and other vulnerable individuals' insecurity is not isolated to times of military, inter-state conflict. Conflict for them starts long before wars begin and ends long after peace is concluded. They are made insecure by economic austerity associated with war, by family destruction, infrastructure losses and long-term care requirements (Sjoberg, 2015: 446). Individuals are threatened by the impacts of proxy wars, environmental degradation, poverty, hunger, human rights abuses – all of which are an integral part of state-based, military conflict (Lin, 2011).

Yet these dimensions of threat and insecurity are not easily acknowledged in traditional security studies. States and militaries can destroy "infrastructure, economic livelihood, social fabrics, and trade routes in a war zone" whilst avoiding guilt, because these are not the focus of security studies (Sjoberg, 2006: 893). This links back to the protection paradox once women are more likely to be impacted by these invisible elements. Nonetheless, the state can stake claim to an illusion of protection (Sjoberg, 2006). Hence, security must be shifted away from its state and military focus to capture this idea of the protection paradox, born out of gender dichotomies and manifested in the invisibility of non-physical threats.

The example of human trafficking effectively illustrates this argument. Increasingly seen as a security issue, traditional security studies consider it a threat to the state and state border control (Lobasz, 2009). It is often lumped in with illegal immigration, with trafficked individuals being treated as criminals. Feminist security studies challenges this and sees trafficked individuals, who are often female, as the victims. Jennifer Lobasz (2009) explains how trafficked individuals are "victimized twice: first by the traffickers and second by the host governments" (Lobasz, 2009: 331). I would argue that a third level needs to be added. Trafficked individuals are also often let down by their home governments, as many vulnerable women and children are trafficked due to their financial, social or physical insecurity – and, therefore, are not effectively protected by their home state. This illustrates the various types of threat

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and violence and how, under the traditional conception of security, the needs of individuals are subordinated to the security needs of the state.

Thinking through feminist intersectionality and security

Security studies require broadening away from its state-centric focus to allow space for contributions from post-colonial feminists who observe the tendency for Western security studies to other and to victimise non-Western security subjects. Doing so is crucial to ensure intersectional and inclusive analysis.

I will illustrate this argument using three examples related to the Bush administration's framing of the war in Afghanistan as a humanitarian intervention to liberate Afghan women (Young, 2003). The Bush administration employed a type of gendered discourse often criticised by post-colonial feminists. Chandra Mohanty (1991), for example, argues that the objectified and generalised category of "third world women" reduces them to passive victims of their "unenlightened cultures", religions and political regimes (Mohanty, 1991: 51-80). Postcolonial feminists ask whether Westerners adopt the "protective" stance towards women from other parts of the world that are seen as dependent or subordinate (Young, 2003: 3), which was evident in the discourse surrounding intervention in Afghanistan.

The first example is Laura Bush's infamous speech in 2001 on the Taliban's oppression of women. Throughout her speech, she repeatedly strings together "women and children". Cynthia Enloe (2014) criticises this image of "womenandchildren" as making them indistinguishable, while Laura Shepherd sees it as infantilising (Enloe, 2014: 1; Shepherd, 2006: 20). The use of this phrase in a large majority of security literature denies women adulthood and agency whilst granting them only pity (Shepherd, 2006).

A second example of the reductive ways in which women were presented in the Bush Administration's speech was the tendency to use adjectives such as "pregnant", "fleeing", "starving" and "widowed" to precede the discussion about the Afghan women's situation. Although often true, these adjectives reduce women to "the sum of their most desperate parts" and encourage listeners to treat them as vulnerable victims and nothing else (Peters, 2001: 123).

My final example is Western feminism's fixation on the veil, as was evident in the discourse about intervention in Afghanistan. Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) describes how Western feminists see veils, from *burqa* to *hijab*, as oppressive, and use them as justification to free the "unfree" women from Muslim societies (Abu-Lughod, 2002: 785-86). While there is some truth to the argument that veil was imposed by the Taliban, this is an oversimplification. Abu-Lughod (2002) quotes Hanna Papanek who argues that many Muslim women see the veil as a liberating invention and points out that Western feminists need to stop confusing veiling with a lack of agency (Abu-Lughod, 2002). Moreover, she argues that we must be wary of reducing complex and multi-faceted situations to a single item of clothing (Abu-Lughod, 2002: 785:86).

All of these examples show how the discursive construction of gender was used to legitimise the US-led attacks on Afghanistan by presenting Afghan women as victims in need of saving. This construction is one that post-colonial feminists see as a common but "deeply problematic" element of traditional security studies (Abu-Lughod, 2002: 788). Political projects justified by the idea of saving other women rely on and contribute to a sense of superiority by Westerners and an arrogance which must be contested (Abu-Lughod, 2002: 789). This arrogance becomes clear in the fact that the lives of Afghan women have changed little since the war, except for those who have lost their homes, families and whatever livelihood they may have had (Reilly, 2002: 16-18).

Post-colonial feminists would also contest that many feminist voices within security studies neglect this intersectional perspective. Mohanty criticises liberal feminists for treating women as a homogenous category – failing to acknowledge their cultural, social, class, race and geographical differences (Tickner and Sjoberg, 2016: 179-195). Different women have different needs and experiences, and security studies require a shift away from the state and the military to open up space for these perceptions to be taken seriously. Although the input of post-colonial feminists is often disregarded by mainstream security studies, it does provide critical interjections that are necessary for both a better understanding of security dilemmas and for solutions that truly consider the experiences of and impact on all

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women – something that the intervention in Afghanistan did not do.

Conclusion

To conclude, traditional security studies is characterised by a protection paradox that becomes clear from a feminist perspective. Because of its narrow focus on military threats to states, the discipline and its conventional actors (the state and the military) endanger those they promise to protect. Therefore, it requires a fundamental broadening. Feminist analysis highlights the importance of moving away from gendered dichotomies and acknowledging the multi-dimensional nature of violence and threats. I have also touched on some of post-colonial feminism's contributions to security studies. These key arguments reflect the ways in which feminist security studies broaden the definition of security by exposing the masculinist blinkers that constrain the traditional discipline (Youngs, 2004). Only through this broadening can security studies begin to understand and address the gendered dimensions of insecurity.

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