The Relation of Security To Identity

Security and identity are two concepts that deeply intertwined on many different levels, and cannot be separated. Not all scholars would agree with this point of view, however. The dominant neo-realist paradigm ignores the role of identity in security; this approach will be analysed first, and largely dismissed. Subsequently, social constructivist arguments about the intersubjectively constructed nature of 'identity' will be considered, and defended from reification criticisms. The Copenhagen School process of securitising a threat to identity will then be critically analysed, before looking at the various ways identities can be defended or secured from said threats. The crucial role of 'identity' in Azar's 'protracted social conflicts' will be examined as a case study of the relationship between identity and security. The essay will conclude that security and identity produce each other, and cannot be separated.

Neorealism dominated late twentieth century International Relations. One of the key theoretical assumptions of neorealism is that all states are unitary. States seek survival, and therefore 'all states, whether democratic or totalitarian, exhibit competitive behaviour.[1]' The interests of states are accordingly uniform; the objective need to survive is universal. According to neorealists, the relationship between identity and security is minimal for this reason. However, this identity-security relationship is deeply flawed on many levels. Momentarily leaving aside the misguided state-centricism of neorealism, the idea that interests are objective is also false. One actor may obviously prioritise certain issues above another on the basis of their identity. For example, France appears to be significantly more interested in regime change in Libya than the Maldives is, which contrastingly prioritises reversing the effects of climate change. Their interests, and by extension agendas and actions, are entirely different. This is because rather than objectively occurring, 'interest follows from identity,[2]' and identity determines the logic of appropriateness.

But what is 'identity', and how does it come about? The increasingly popular field of social constructivism attempts to answer this question. Identity does not exist objectively; rather, it is intersubjectively constructed, as are all other social facts. Social facts like 'identity' do not exist in any objective sense like a mountain does, but rather come about because we have created them. Essentially, expectations about the 'self' come from the perception of 'self' that is cemented by said actor, but also by the 'other' – 'every identity needs an 'other' against which it is set.[3]'. These identities are complex, and can be constructed over significant periods of time. Germany has developed a 'pacifist identity[4]', potentially as a result of the infamous Holocaust period under the dictator Adolf Hitler. This identity was shown in Germany and Chancellor Schroeder's 'strong public rejection[5]' of Tony Blair and George W. Bush's mission to oust Saddam Hussein from office in Iraq in 2003. Identity and security are henceforth inseparable; the identity of an actor affects, and even entirely guides, all attempts to make 'something' secure.

The Copenhagen School introduced the concept of 'securitisation', which makes explicit the relationship between identity and security. While previous theories focused mainly on states, Copenhagen School theorists introduced the idea of 'societal security.' While this can relate to the security of national identity, it is more often invoked with regard to sub-sectional groups or identities within the state, such as an ethnic group like the Tutsis in Rwanda, or a religious group like the Islamic Uighurs in China. Societal security relates to 'the sustainable development of traditional patterns of language, culture, religious and identities and customs of societies.[6]' It was the aforementioned process of 'securitisation', however, which investigates how security threats to said societal identities are constructed. Securitisation is 'a more extreme version of politicisation,[7]' in that a securitising actor identifies a threat to the identity in question, and 'asserts that it has to adopt extraordinary means that go beyond the ordinary norms of the political domain [to nullify the threat].'[8]' Therefore, the relationship between identity and security is a very close one;

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identity necessitates security.

The argument that the constructivist notion of 'identity' is based on reification can be dismissed. McSweeney argues that the Copenhagen School treats 'identity' as an objective reality, claiming rather that 'identity is not a fact of society; it is a process of negotiation.[9]' Identity is supposedly so fluid that it cannot reliably be the referent object of security, or a unit of analysis. However, this is a fundamental misreading of social constructivism. Copenhagen School theorists argue that social facts (such as 'identity'), while intersubjectively constructed and 're-mouldable' at any point in time, remain relatively 'sticky.' As Theiler outlines, 'when beliefs and institutions become deeply sedimented, they change only very slowly.[10]' The Masai tribe of Kenya and Tanzania, for example, is unlikely to imminently disappear as an identity, having existed in some form since the late 17th century[11]. Therefore, this criticism that the notion of 'identity' is a reification can be dismissed.

Buzan has developed a five-dimensional approach to societal security[12], and threats to identity can come from each of these spheres. They include military identity threats (e.g. Hutu extermination of Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994); political (e.g. in Sri Lanka, Sinhalese exclusion of the Tamil minority); cultural and economic (e.g. globalisation eroding traditional cultures around the world – McDonald's restaurants in 119 nation states[13]); and environmental threats to identity (e.g. Amerindian tribes' identity threatened by the rapid Amazonian deforestation.) He also looks at horizontal competition, where influence from a neighbouring identity threatens another identity, and vertical competition, where institutions like the EU, which widen and homogenise identity. In each of these instances, a securitising actor has identified and politicised a perceived 'threat' to the very existence of each of these identities. Identity and security are inseparable here – neorealism fails to take into account the role of identity in creating interests and, by extension, securitising actions.

The responses to 'secure' or protect a threatened identity also prove the links between identity and security, and such responses can be broadly divided into military responses and non-military responses. Military responses are self-explanatory, and involve a society defending its threatened identity through the use of force. This is 'particularly the case if identity is linked to territory[14]', and the most evident example here is the Palestinians, who feel their identity and homeland is threatened by the expansionist Israeli state, using military tactics to attempt to defend their identity. Hamas and their military wing the Al-Qassam Brigades use such military methods to defend Palestinian identity[15].

However, military responses are often impossible for some identity groups, due to insufficient resources to mount a successful military challenge, or perhaps because the threat to the identity is non-military. Waever advocates 'defending culture with culture, and consequently, culture becomes security policy.[16]' Threats to culture must be met with projects of 'cultural nationalism[17]' to strengthen that very cultural identity which is threatened. The French anti-globalisation movement, unofficially led by José Bové, seeks to oppose the erosion of 'traditional French farmer culture', which is perceived to be threatened by the forces of globalisation. Whether this is a real threat is unimportant – a securitised threat to the intersubjectively constructed French farmer identity 'exists' subjectively here. Identity and security are thus mutually reinforcing.

Another significant branch of non-military response to securitised identity threats involve ethno-political nationalism. This involves a society, usually within a pre-existing state, although possibly transcending state borders, whose identity is felt to be threatened to the point that secession must be attained for survival. Somaliland, a now semi-autonomous region of Somalia, provides an example of this. The former President Siad Barre committed massacres against the Somaliland people in 1988[18], leading to the securitisation of such a threat by regional leaders, and finally a drive for independence. Somaliland identity has evolved from Somali national identity, and while the region lacks official sovereignty recognition, it is de facto autonomous. This indicates that identity and security are inseparable; one cannot begin to talk about security without talking about the identity which is being secured, and vice versa.

Edward Azar's conceptualisation of 'Protracted Social Conflicts' (PSC) highlights the inseparability of identity and security, in stark contrast to the outdated neorealist tradition. PSC can be defined as 'hostile interactions between communal groups that are based in deep-seated racial, ethnic, religious and cultural hatreds, and that persist over

long periods of time with sporadic outbreaks of violence.[19]' These conflicts occur within states – however, one identity community can clash *with* the state in attempts to attain security. Lebanon is an example of a state that is engaged in PSC. The (Christian) Maronites who migrated to Lebanon considered the Muslim inhabitants to be 'religiously and culturally alien.[20]' The Maronites securitised the persecuting threat to their identity supposedly posed by the Muslims, which included a policy of forced religious conversion[21]. In 1860, the Maronites felt persecuted to the extent that they attempted to seize power, which led to their massacre by the Muslims. To this day, PSC continues between the religious groups in Lebanon, and the Maronites continue to feel that their identity is threatened by Muslims. Security is thus needed to defend identity – the two concepts are deeply intertwined, and Maronite security cannot be explained without taking into account the subjective role of Maronite identity.

To conclude, security and identity are not only related, but mutually reinforce each other to a significant extent. Without security, identity cannot exist, and vice versa. Identity groups securitise threats to their survival, and respond as best they can to nullify that security threat, whether by military, cultural or political means. Neorealism is fatally flawed in its refusal to accept the role of intersubjectively constructed identities as the precursor to interests, and in its narrow focus upon states. While identities are intersubjectively constructed and can emerge or disappear over time, they remain relatively fixed entities, and are thus an essential referent object for security.

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