

An Analysis of the Contribution of Feminist Point of View to Security Studies

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Citation: Navodya, L. M. S. (2025). An Analysis of the Contribution of Feminist Point of View to Security Studies. *Digit Hum Soc Sci Cult Preserv*, 1(1), 01-04.

Abstract

This paper studies the contributions of feminist analyses to the field of Security Studies, a traditionally masculinized domain that has long revolved around state security and military threats. Drawing from the work of feminist scholars like J. Ann Tickner, Carol Cohn, and Cynthia Enloe, it demonstrates how feminist perspectives challenge conventional assumptions within Security Studies. The findings highlight the gendered nature of security, exposing the discipline's blind spots and urging a shift towards a more inclusive, gender-conscious approach where the scope of security would be broadened while identifying diverse threats—such as economic, environmental, and personal insecurity. The study emphasizes the need for gender to be a central level of analysis, arguing that security involves not only states but also individuals and communities. It concludes that feminist perspectives enrich Security Studies by challenging its gender biases, expanding its scope, and advocating for a more comprehensive understanding of security that encompasses both state and human security.

Keywords: Feminist Security Studies, Security and Gender

Introduction

Despite the term 'Feminist Security Studies' not being coined until the mid-2000's, feminist International Relations (IR) scholars such as Professor J. Ann Tickner, Carol Cohn and Cynthia Enloe have, under the umbrella term of 'Feminist International Relations', engaged in extensive research on the field of security thereby providing a novel perspective to Security Studies [1]. According to Professor Tickner, feminist IR has emerged since the late 1980's and after the Cold War, influenced by the changes that materialized within the world order with the emergence of intra-state conflicts spurred by issues related to identity, ethnicity, religion and so on [2]. Thus, since then, the work of the feminist IR scholars studying security has greatly contributed to expand the scope of Security Studies which for a long time was spanning around the notion of state and military security. The primary objective of this paper will therefore be to discuss with examples what contributions does a security analysis from a feminist point of view add to Security Studies.

Contributions of Feminist Security Analyses to Security Studies

Security Studies emerged as a sub-discipline of IR in the mid-1900's, specifically after the end of the Second World War, as a means of studying the main drivers of international politics. It could be observed that since its emergence, Security Studies has been heavily dominated by explanations and narratives woven around the behavior of states in the international system and the threats (mostly military) that could be directed towards them. This was mainly a result of realism, with its state-centric and military focus, dominating the discipline as the most popular and widely accepted traditional theory of IR in explaining 'security' within Security Studies. As per the realists, the main problem in international relations is the insecurity of states who are viewed as self-interested rational actors competing for survival in an anarchic international system where self-help remains as the only option for survival as cited in Tripp [3]. In explaining the origins and the nature of threats that could be posed against states, realists furthermore promoted the divisions of the 'public' and 'private' spheres where the 'public' sphere was defined as the world outside the state characterized by anarchy and danger from which threats against states could originate while the 'private' sphere was defined as the realm inside the

state which was believed to be orderly and is out of state concern [4]. Thus, guided by these main tenets, the study of security has, for long, considered the state as the agent (guarantor) as well as the referent object of security.

Thus, an analysis of security from a feminist point of view which looks at security from a bottom-up approach, adds to the existing discourse of Security Studies in many ways by challenging the long-held conventional assumptions within the discipline.

One such addition is the exposure of the gaps which need to be addressed within Security Studies by shedding light upon the implicitly masculinized and gender-blind nature of the sub-discipline and its praxis. According to Sjoberg, feminist IR scholars studying security share "a normative and empirical concern that the international system is gender-hierarchical" where the normative concern reflects that gender hierarchy is wrong while the empirical concern reflects it could result in incorrect and incomplete analyses [5].

Thus, feminist IR scholars like Professor Tickner, Carol Cohn and Cynthia Enloe, who based their research on different parts of the chain of international security, brought into light the fact that similar to IR, security and its core concepts like state, violence, war and peace were also heavily masculinized where most analysis within the field was based on assumptions derived from the experiences of men [6].

For instance, in the article 'Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation', Tickner criticizes Morgenthau's realist assumptions by noting that "international relations is a man's world, a world of power and conflict in which warfare is a privileged activity". Furthermore, True in her analysis, sheds light upon how the state is constructed on the "dual gendered dichotomy" of 'public' and 'private' spheres where the role and the experiences of women related to security are neglected based on the argument that they belong to the 'private' domain which is out of the state concern. In addition, Enloe's question of "Where are the women?" in international politics and especially within military bases spurred much debate and research on the gendered nature of international security. For instance, feminist scholars like Catherine Mackinnon and Susan Brownmiller through the research demonstrates the role of rape in armed conflicts while Galia Golan through her work on Israeli militarization demonstrates how Israeli women were barred from holding combat positions [7,8].

Another way in which a security analysis from a feminist point of view, contributes to Security Studies is by depicting the importance of including gender as a central and constant level of analysis when studying security. Zalewski's idea that "the driving force of feminism is its attention to gender and not simply women...The concept, nature, and practice of gender are key", clearly depicts the extent of importance that the feminist IR scholars provide to the concept of gender in their analyses. Sjoberg furthermore, highlight that when feminists studying security refer to the term 'gender' they do not merely focus their attention to where men and women are positioned within the security realm but to how the gendered divisions existing within societies and the security institutions impact their role within international security. Thus, it is through this discussion of the role of gender in the realm of international security that security analyses from a feminist point of view emphasize and call for the consideration of gender as an essential level of analysis in Security Studies.

For instance, security analyses done from a feminist perspective demonstrates the role of gender as a "constitutive" and "causal" factor in international security where gender is a feature embedded in the identity and interactions of actors and is also a main determinant of political behavior. For instance, depicting the "constitutive" nature of gender in international security, Sjoberg cites the example of Lauren Wilcox's analysis in "Gendering the Cult of the Offensive" which provided the finding that gender makes an essential part of the perceptions of potential hostile entities about the offence- defense balance, where those perceptions are not formed by "quantitative and qualitative military advantage" but by "gendered perceptions of technology, gendered nationalism". Furthermore, as an example for the role of gender as a "causal" factor, Sjoberg mentions Megan MacKenzie's analysis in "Securitization and Desecuritization: Female Soldiers and the Reconstruction of Women in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone" which depicted how the desecuritization of the former female combatants resulted in making the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in Sierra Leone ineffective.

In addition, Galia Golan's analysis of Israeli militarization demonstrates the significant role played by gender in politics of security and policymaking. Golan in her findings depict that the Israel military despite being a central institution in the country, is a patriarchal institution which perpetuates gendered beliefs that women are subordinates by barring women from combat positions. According to Golan, one's status in the army is determined by their relation to combat position and that military status thereby affects one's status in the society. She then explains that the act of subordination of women in the Israeli army leads to the subordination of them in the society thereby resulting in the underestimation of peaceful policies within Israel politics.

Thus, a security analysis from a feminist point of view would not contribute to Security Studies merely by bringing into light the importance of including gender as a level of analysis in security studies but by also paving a way for the discipline to resolve its issue of being masculinized and gender blind.

With the feminist emphasis on the vitality of gender in the analysis of security, another contribution that an analysis from a feminist point of view does to Security Studies is the expansion of the scope of Security Studies by redefining security in terms of the referent object of security and what counts as a security threat. Pioneer feminist IR scholars such as Tickner in her work "Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspective on Achieving Global Security" by arguing for reflectivism over rationalism, emphasizes on the importance of including individual agency within IR and its sub-disciplines where the definition of security would go beyond states and military threats [9].

Thus, various analysis of security from a feminist perspective shows that the referent object of security includes individuals and communities in addition to states and that security threats can come in myriad forms such as health, economic, environmental, personal insecurities and from within a state itself instead of merely being military threats that are directed towards a state from another state in its 'public' sphere.

Furthermore, feminist IR scholars like Enloe by demonstrating how gender existed in both traditional and more ordinary national security issues, adds to the broadening of who deserves security, by questioning the restriction of security to 'high politics' [10]. In addition to providing an example to depict the need to broaden the referent object of security, by her acknowledgement that instances like sex tourism and women's peace movements as national security issues, Enloe supports the feminist call to broaden what counts as a security threat by the recognition of the multidimensional nature of threats.

In explaining the broadening of the referent object of security further, feminist studying security demonstrates how, on one hand, the security of individuals is related to national and international politics and how, on the other hand, international and national politics impact the security of individuals. Thus, feminists like Enloe argues that "the personal is international and the international is personal".

According to Sjoberg, Katherine Moon's analysis on military prostitution within the security relations between the United States (U.S.) and South Korea provides a quintessential example for the above argument. Moon in 'Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.- Korea Relations' discusses of how the South Korean government had actively promoted prostitution in the areas around the U.S. military installations to encourage the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea and how in the U.S.-South Korea negotiations to maintain the U.S. military presence in South Korea, the U.S. government has demanded the South Korean government several times to regulate prostitution in areas around the U.S. military bases, specifically the regulation of the spread of venereal diseases during the 1970's [11]. Thus, according to Sjoberg, the demonstration of how the bodies of women impact the security relations between the two states depict how personal becomes international while the demonstration of how the relations between the two states created a demand for prostitution depicts how international becomes personal.

Furthermore, the example of how the South Korean government promoted prostitution to ensure its security also portray how states, which according to the traditionalists were the protector of civilians from external attacks, could themselves be perpetrators of violence against their civilians. This, thus adds to the feminist argument that secure states often become so, at the expense of the security of some of their citizens.

Last but not least, the discussed additions that an analysis from a feminist point of view make to Security Studies, ultimately results in adding new empirical knowledge to the existing knowledge base of the discipline such as that on role of gender in militaries and sexual violence committed in wars and armed conflicts. For instance, feminist analysis done on sexual violence committed in wars and armed conflicts sheds light upon acts of violence such as rape and sexual exploitation prevalent in militaries. A quintessential example for this is the afore-mentioned example of Katherine Moon's work which discusses military prostitution. Furthermore, according to Sjoberg, feminists analyzing cases such as the Rwandan genocide and former Yugoslavia to understand the sexual violence committed in wars and armed conflicts, has shown that rape is prominently seen during war than in peace and is "institutionalized in war" as a relaxing activity and a weapon in addition to risking the lives of women. Feminists have thus argued that "wartime rape is...a collective security problem. Rape happens, not as a question of thoughtlessness, provocative or unfortunate behavior, but as a question of national warfare". Sjoberg thus mentions that with such arguments, feminists studying security has advocated for the inclusion of wartime rape into the agenda of Security Studies.

Conclusion

For long traditionalist discourses such as the explanations of Realism has dominated Security Studies where in security analyses, states were viewed as the only referent object of security while the military threats posed at them were viewed as the only form of threat that could threaten the survival of states. Given this noted trend, the primary objective of this paper was to discuss what an analysis from a feminist point of view adds to the prevailing discourse in Security Studies. It thus discussed major additions such as: the exposure of gaps in Security Studies that needs to be addressed such as its masculinized and gender-blind nature; the emphasis on the vitality of including gender as a central and constant level of security analysis; the broadening of the scope of security in terms of who merits security and what counts as a security threat and the addition of new empirical knowledge to the existing knowledge base of Security Studies. In a nutshell, the study thus depicts that an analysis from a feminist point of view, adds many contributions to Security Studies [11-15].

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