

ENGENDERING SECURITY

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Summary

This chapter will critically interrogate constructions of security generically, and human security specifically, in relation to women and notions of women's security. The constructs national security and human security will be critiqued, whose interests these serve, and how these constructs are specifically gendered (and class-based) and neglect issues relevant to women specifically, and other marginalized members of the international community.

Johan Galtung's 1996 triangular model of violence, with its antitheses peace, will be examined, in order to explicate violence generically, which will lead to an examination of gender-based violence more specifically, premised on a deconstruction of patriarchal ideology, and drawing on the feminist anthropology of Marija Gimbutas and Riane Eisler et al.

The final section seeks to rethink activisms, employing the work of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Ang San Suu Kyi.

State-centered security concerns itself with armies, guns and war, and excludes people's basic needs. This chapter argues that the imperatives for peace are human security and justice.

1. Introduction: Is Security Gendered?

At workshops in Cape Town, South Africa, grassroots women identified their needs for spouses or partners to be faithful and monogamous. Given the high rate of generic societal violence, they also requested more mortuary vans and ambulances. These women specifically called for an end to violence, an end to the gangsterism that plagues their communities, and critically, given the pandemic of gender-based violence in South Africa, an end to violence against women and children.

A study by Bollen and colleagues on violence against women in metropolitan South Africa found that almost 60 percent of women felt 'very unsafe' while walking in their own neighborhoods at night, with only five percent of women feeling 'very safe' in their neighborhoods at night [1999:78,75]. The alarming statistics on violence against women illustrates that a lack of women's security affects the entire Southern African region. Goldblatt and Meintjes discuss the present effects on women of apartheid violence against communities, the condition of women in the aftermath:

The entrenchment of violence creates new daily insecurities for women - constant and overwhelming fear, exposure to abuse and obscenities, and threats of rape, kidnapping or death for themselves, their children or other relatives. [1998:8]

Security and Peace Studies have been dominated by men, and men's interests, particularly their emphasis on guns and war. As with most fields of study, women's interests and needs have been largely neglected and ignored.

2. Contesting Security

Barry Buzan recognizes security as an underdeveloped and contested concept. Buzan draws critical conceptual distinctions between defense and security, individual and national security, national and international security, violent means and peaceful ends. He applies his concept across a range of military, political, economic and social sectors. According to Buzan the national security problem is a systemic security problem in which individuals, states and the system all play a part. Thus Buzan proposes the holistic notion of systemic security so that the:

national security problem defines itself as much in economic, political and social terms as in military ones. [1983:187]

2.1. National Security

Security has tended to be defined in terms of the nation state. Thus the notion of national security, emanating predominantly from the field of Strategic Studies, is dominated by the neo-realist mode of thought, with its focus on power and institutions of power, especially the military. Neo-realist thought and notions of the state derive from Thomas Hobbes [1651]. His infamous postulate that life in a state of nature is 'nasty, brutish and short', epitomizes the neo-realist hypothesis of an international state system of anarchy. Classical American neo-realist theorists, especially Carr [1939], Morgenthau [1948] and Waltz [1954, 1979] built on the Hobbesian notion of an anarchic state system. Reacting to this position, Maxi Schoeman [1998:7,22-3], who has extensively researched women's security in Southern Africa, criticizes Waltz in

particular for ‘de-historicizing’ the international state system and assuming its:

inevitability, rather than admitting that it is a human construct and a product of a specific era and context.

The British academic, Hedley Bull [1977], tried to theorize a form of anarchy characterized by at least some interdependence and co-operation in his writings on an ‘international society’ of states. Bull’s key contention centers on his notion of ‘society’ versus that of the traditional, more anarchic system, thus arguably placing his thinking between neo-liberal and neo-realist thought. Schoeman, citing Robert Keohane, suggests that one objective of neo-liberalism: is to ensure that the state-system and the capitalist world economy function smoothly in their co-existence by diffusing any conflicts, tensions, or crises that may arise between them. (1998:7) Hence, the need to maintain the international states system, with Bull’s (1977) idea of a loose society of states, cooperating to perpetuate the status quo. Issues about what constitutes cooperation, and whose interests it serves, can be derived from rudimentary studies of the world system’s theory of Wallerstein [1979]. More recent critical theory is fundamentally concerned with historicizing the status quo, and seeking structural transformation.

This traditional notion of national security, in terms of armies, guns and war, emphasizes the state as both the primary actor and level of analysis. Narrow state-centrism excludes other important actors and levels of analyses, including individuals and groups (ethnicities and religious groupings, political and ideological groups, and non-state actors like corporate mercenaries), as well as other institutions (e.g. transnational corporations [TNCs] and multi-national corporations [MNCs], international financial institutions [IFIs] such as the World Bank, as well as the global arms trade - from manufacturers to marketers to purchasers). The modern move away from inter-state war to intra-state conflict, in particular, stresses the importance of group and institutional analyses, eg the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) involves regional, linguistic, economic group, state and international dimensions. It involves various political and military groups, as well as especially diamond and oil TNCs, as well as other African states, notably Namibia, Zimbabwe, Angola, Uganda, Rwanda, as well as non-African states such as the United States, Belgium and France. It includes non-state actors such as mercenaries, arms and other suppliers, locally and internationally.

This skewed focus on the state usually excludes the worst affected, women and children, especially in rural areas where women and children are the ones who have to seek fresh water and wood for fuel, which exposes them to landmines. Hence the irony of men who plant landmines to deter other men, but which largely kill and maim women and children trying to survive during and after conflicts.

The traditional definition of security also emphasizes protection from harm for citizens of a country within national boundaries. National boundaries in Africa are colonial legacies, often arbitrary, and variously disputed, e.g. the Kasikili/Sedudu Island conflict between Namibia and Botswana. Sovereignty of borders is often bestowed, with little or no consultation, and with little regard by the international community to the impacts on

the inhabitants within the borders. Eritrea, for example, is deemed a sovereign state after its secession from Ethiopia, while Somaliland, where women contributed significantly to brokering peace, is not officially recognized.

The idea of protection from harm for citizens is narrowly defined, and effectively means protection from foreign attack, but does not preclude offensive measures deemed in the interests of citizens and state—for example, South Africa and Botswana's military intervention in Lesotho during 1998, as well as Namibia's incursions into Angola against UNITA. So too, this traditional definition of harm does not include other aspects of safety, security or wellbeing, including the environment, basic needs (for example food and housing), identity and dignity. A more holistic definition of protection from harm would mean more than the traditional protection from war and invasion by foreign armies. It would mean, to name a few examples, protection from hunger, protection from poverty, protection from sexual assault for women, children and men.

The traditional national security definition of protection from harm refers to a state-level notion of harm, and does not protect citizens from homelessness, illiteracy and unemployment. Nor does it protect citizens' fundamental human rights, as enshrined in the South African Constitution, to be free of discrimination on the grounds of race, class, gender, spirituality or sexuality. Negative peace, or the absence of war, conforms to traditional definitions of security in general, and traditional protection from harm in particular. Positive peace, on the other hand, means both negative peace, as well as the realization of even the most basic of social justice needs.

Traditional notions of security are based on conventional (though flawed) distinctions between public and private spheres. The state has traditionally been concerned with the male-dominated public realm. Thus issues outside of the public realm, including domestic violence, job discrimination, the status of women, have not been viewed as concerns of national security.

According to peace educator and activist, Betty Reardon, (Email, January 1999), the three major problems with the international security system are:

(Firstly) it is dominantly masculine rather than human in conception; (secondly) it is designed to achieve the security of the state rather than that of persons or human groups; and (thirdly), what is most readily evident, it addresses only one of four fundamental sources of human wellbeing. The condition of world-wide insecurity exists because the present state-centred security paradigm places a priority on protection against harm from others over all other sources of human wellbeing. The militarised international security system is maintained at the expense of the abuse of the natural environment. It sets limits on meeting the economic and social needs of the world's poor. It disregards and violates fundamental, universal human rights, and provides inadequate protection against the harms of ill health, poor infrastructures, and accident and disaster provision, as inordinate resources, research, human talent and human effort are squandered on the armed defence of 'national security'. The system is inadequate, indeed, dangerous because it is imbalanced. It is derived by exclusively masculine, outwardly directed standards applied by the

predominantly male 'national security' establishments who have not been socialised to focus on human needs.

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Biographical Sketch

Bernedette is Director of a registered NGO, Engender, which provides research and capacity building for communities of people on genders and sexualities, justice and peace. Her community activism is integrally related to her work with international organizations, and her research necessarily reflects the values of equity, social change and justice.

She has published creative writing and academic work widely, written for diverse audiences, and believes in accessible research and writing.

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