

The Problem of Security Through the Gendered Lens

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Abstract: The paper presents the question of security analysis through the prism of feminist theories. The examinations cover the main dilemmas and challenges in political science, which are framed by feminist rhetoric. The paper discusses the issues of feminist research, which can be used in the analysis of armed conflicts and non-military threats. The main thesis of the article consists of the claim that a certain kind of “male skew” dominates and is perpetuated in scientific considerations, while a feminist approach would considerably extend and broaden security-related phenomena analyses. The article concludes that the origins, structure, and functioning of any security system without a gendered lens is incomplete and needs further reflection.

Keywords: *gender, feminism, terrorism, security, violence.*

Introduction

Feminist research in the area of security focuses primarily on reformulating theories and evaluating empirical assumptions. It re-visits the concepts of sovereignty, state and security, expanding the discourse by research questions regarding the presence (or in fact the reasons for the absence) of women among the entities shaping security and defense policies. Moreover, the goal of feminism is to re-establish the presence of women in many areas of social life, including security studies. The intention is to analyse women as actors and their experiences assuming that men’s experiences are distinct. The social determinants may differ in view of the gender roles and the meanings assigned to them. The feminist approach is particularly useful in the analysis of security threats like: wars, armed conflicts, asymmetric threats, e.g. guerrilla warfare or terrorism. (Gasztold, 2017)

According to a feminist perspective, security is perceived through the prism of human needs. As J. Ann Tickner notes, the broadening of our understanding of security per se to encompass economic and ecological aspects means the state ceases to be an adequate (and self-sufficient) provider of security (Tickner, 1997a: 187). Feminism focuses not only on the very concept of security and its new dimensions, but also on entities that provide and ensure security. Therefore, the analysis is often conducted using a bottom-up approach, starting at the level of the individual, then the local community, the state and finally at the level of the international system.

This is to demonstrate the double-track nature of the interaction, i.e. how the security of the individual is linked to national and international security and how international relations affect the security of the individual even at local levels. (Tickner, 2007: 193)

This article aims to outline the basic issues of feminism in security research. To this end, selected assumptions and conceptions – situated mainly within the domains of liberal, radical and postcolonial feminism – shall be presented. The method of critical analysis of texts that moulded feminist research in the field of international relations and security studies, particularly in Anglo-Saxon countries, is applied. The main intention of the author is to expose unequal gender relations, which shape the perception of security, and to attempt to answer the question of whether including a female perspective will allow to develop a broader definition of security as well as a more comprehensive analysis of threats. Due to the traditional understanding of internal and external functions of the state in the area of ensuring security through a predominantly military prism – one associated with masculinity – the roles and experiences of women were marginalized and thus such an interpretation of reality seems to be incomplete and devoid of objectivity.

Violence Against Women

Jane Addams, the founder of the Woman's Peace Party, made a pioneer contribution to the debate on security. Among other things, she took part in organizing a congress of over 1,000 women from Europe and North America, which took place in The Hague in the midst of World War I, from April 28 to May 1, 1915. The main topics of discussion included ceasing military actions and the chances of restoring peace. The event marked the foundation of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). It was Jane Addams, together with other activists of the women's movement for peace, Emily G. Balch and Alice Hamilton. Addams was actively calling for a new internationalism while criticizing nationalism as the main cause of the war, and pointing out that it is the women and the children who are the main victims of armed conflicts (Addams & Balch & Hamilton, 1916). For her work, Addams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, and Balch in 1946.

Violence against women, especially as a consequence of a political situation, was part of the international discourse after World War II as well. The United Nations periodically published situational reports on the situation of women, including those in regions affected by armed conflict. An extreme case was, and is, regarding the so-called honor killings,

mutilations and the rejection of unmarried and childless females as the norm of violence. Throughout the years women and children have constituted the largest group of refugees, as they are primary victims of injustice, whether in times of war or peace. Nevertheless, the interest in the role and situation of women during wartime was marginal, especially within the scope of traditional political sciences. A change in perception was brought about by female political scientists, who were not necessarily feminists. Their works, however, did not trigger a broader debate within the history of militarism or prompt the development of a “feminist theory of war.” The *gender* variable remains on the of the main discourse. And the history of wars remains a history of men. (Goldstein, 2001: 34-36)

Armed conflicts lead to an intensification in the use of sexual-based violence against women, both physical and psychological. Susan Brownmiller – when considering the situation of women in the 1960s in the US – even remarks that being defeated was long equated with females, and that over time became a component of the female role (Brownmiller, 1970). This conclusion can be transferred to the situation of women in times of war: winning is the domain of men, the role for women is to seek refuge or become a victim. A general phenomenon is the re-sexualization of violence, including incidents of rape towards ethnically different communities e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, Congo, and Myanmar (Stiglmayer 1994; Askin, 1999; Hayden, 2000; Skjelbæk 2006). Both the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) included rape as a crime against humanity. The tribunals issued indictments for sexual violence, and the defendants were found guilty of rape, abduction and torture, and of crimes committed with specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a certain group (crime of genocide by rape) and of violating the laws and customs of war. The intentionality of rape and its physical and psychological effects bring it closer to the concept of torture. It has also been recognized as a form of discrimination against women, an act committed against women because they are women. The rules developed by ICTY and ICTR have been incorporated into the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in article 7 (g) and article 8 (vi), which has been in effect since July 1, 2002. The inaugural meeting of the ICC was held on March 11, 2003¹⁶. Herfried Münkler recognized the method of rape as one of the characteristics of new war economy (Münkler, 2002). The re-sexualization of violence also brings about the humiliation of men, or even a deprivation

¹⁶Document:https://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/ea9aef7-5752-4f84-be940a655eb30e16/0/rome_statute_english.pdf (2.02.2018)

of masculinity through the mechanism of transferred guilt (for not being able to protect their women), with which the victims are burdened. Thus armed conflicts cause double harm to women: the violence they experience from the aggressors as well as the rejection, or “secondary victimization,” they suffer after the trauma from their own ethnic/national groups. The myth that women are protected by men in times of armed conflict or in times of peace should therefore be redefined. (Stiehm, 1983)

Violence against women, especially sexual gender-based violence, cannot in any way be compared with such violence experienced by men. It is widely believed that aggression towards women is more prevalent in militarized societies and acceptable or endorsed in patriarchal systems (e.g. through legislation, controlling women’s rights to their own bodies or their image and other customary practices). The main institution that perpetuates this state of affairs and reflects the society on a microscale is the family (Millet, 2005: 42). Not without significance is socialisation and a universally accepted prejudice about the superiority of men which both sustain their dominant, superior position. This male supremacy is not based on physical strength, but rather on the acceptance of a certain system of values. Thus, violence against women sanctioned within the family by the superior position of the man relates to violence in general, including public, state and political violence. These relations are linked and bound by the phenomenon of power where authority is defined through the possibility of using force. The role of a man as the perpetrator and the woman as the victim derives from a general acceptance of such a state of affairs by both sexes, that is, their perception of power through the prism of managing and administering violence.

Kate Millett emphasises that patriarchal communities generally tend to combine cruelty with sexuality, not so much as a display of evil but as a display of power. While sadism is associated with the “male role,” the experience of being a victim is associated with the “female role.” These observations also came up in the psychoanalysis and study on pornography. Biological sex(sex) is – as Millett puts it – a status category with political implications since it comes down to a relationship of dominance and subordination and outlines the phenomenon of authority (*Herrschaft*) as defined by Max Weber (Millet, 2005: 38). Women are subjected to “cultural training” and “conditioned from a young age by opinions on which »we all agree« and which »cannot be challenged« and thus are trapped in a web of social expectations, standards, and instructions” (Hołówka, 1982: 17). However, relations developed within the family, based on male dominance, i.e. on discrimination against women, do not entail a lack of choice for women. Sexism, characteristic of male dominance, is not always

associated with oppression. One clear example would be the significant areas of freedom for women in capitalist countries – or in fact, as black feminists argue, “appearances” of those as they mainly apply to white middle class women for whom being a feminist means achieving success on equal terms with men.

Domestic violence, affecting mainly women and children, also exposes the weakness of the state as it takes place in a space that is allegedly covered by legal regulations. Women constitute half of the world’s population and one-third of the active labour force and they account for two-thirds of all working hours, yet they only receive 10% of global revenues and own less than 1% of world property. Women earn less than men, they experience poverty more often than men and have greater difficulty in securing employment. Also, when they act as the head of the family (e.g. single mothers, unemployment or illness of the partner) they transfer poverty onto their children (“intergenerational transmission of poverty”). In addition to the living conditions (material position of women) their social situation is problematic as well. This undermines the role of the state as an organization that provides care and security to all its citizens (UN Women, 2000). In 2010 a global initiative called United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) was established with the aim to further the agenda for women and girls. This project drew from the framework of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action elaborated fifteen years earlier during the Fourth World Conference on Women. However, to this day there is no international database that would include a gender variable in the study of e.g. poverty levels. (Chant, 2008)

Maggie Humm in the Dictionary of feminist theory (Humm, 1989) under the term aggression invokes researchers who took it upon themselves to analyze the problem, including biological and psychological differences (feminist psychoanalysis), recognizing the phenomenon of male aggression as a product not of biology but of social and cultural context. This is confirmed by anthropological research that has shown that both women and men can generate aggression (Mead, 1949). However, the dispute within the framework of feminism has not been resolved. Susan Brownmiller argues that genetics is responsible for the aggression of men, which is a form of expressing rage and anger (Brownmiller, 1975). Whereas Ruth Bleier claims the term has undergone a certain anthropomorphization (Bleier, 1984). The assumption that men are more aggressive than women was scientifically confirmed and said to be determined by, for example, physicality, a tendency to limit the feeling of repentance or guilt as well as conditioned culturally, by gender roles (Zięba, 2016: 30-32). Differences between women and men in regards to aggressive behaviour, including physical and

verbal abuse, have been proven and it has also been shown that women are able to refrain from the use of force for longer than men. This was attributed to women being likely to feel the fear of consequences. These differences in the use of force are confirmed in studies on all the different cultures, also among children (Archer, 2004). In their research, B. Ann Bettencourt and Norman Miller found that women become aggressive in specific situations. A catalyst could be, for example, a provocation, which is a frequent element of social life. Its intensity, type of influence (negative/positive) and whether it can trigger a feeling of fear of danger all play a role. Negative provocations include insults, pejorative evaluation, physical assault or causing frustration. Similar reactions to provocation were observed among men that do not confirm assumptions on the differences between genders. (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996)

Impulsive behaviour was affiliated with a high level of testosterone. This hormone positively affects the level of aggression and may manifest itself in antisocial behaviour (Dabbs & Morris, 1990). However, studies have shown that the level of testosterone among children aged 1 to 7 is similar regardless of sex. As a boy grows up, the level of testosterone rises and this increase can be associated with the need for dominance, but understood rather as achieving social success than using physical aggression (Mazur & Booth, 1998). Therefore, this does not confirm the natural tendency of men to participate in political violence. A different premise could be the need for a man to prove himself in the role of a warrior, which is related to competition with other men and upbringing. The status of a warrior, especially in traditional cultures, embodied this heroic ethos. The related prestige and fame had an impact on the access to certain goods and prompted an increase in the number of sexual partners. (Van Vugt & De Cremer & Janssen 2007)

Women in Armed Conflicts

In most countries, citizenship is correlated with a military version of patriotism and a vision of sacrificing life for homeland. According to J. Ann Tickner, women, who were excluded from armed combat, were thus considered second-class citizens or victims, assuming that they did not possess any defensive skills. The political identity of citizens was largely based on the protector–protected relationship, being a stark manifestation of gender inequality. Such an approach to defining security is incomplete. The ever-widening understanding of the notion, encompassing economic, social, cultural and ecological aspects has revealed to many researchers just how exposed to women vulnerability (Tickner, 1997: 191-192). On the other

hand, especially within the realm of postcolonial feminism, there has been growing criticism of the discourse on the perception of women in times of armed conflict. Notably, the portrayal of women as in need of protection by men, a certain form of protectorate and rescue from peril, and the ignorance of the conditions that make up the lives of women in particular regions of the world have been strongly disputed. Especially in the era of new wars, the position of victim-woman (followed by rescued woman) is being exposed in an excessive and simplified manner, reinforcing gender stereotypes (Stiehm, 1983). The fetishization of weapons, armed conflicts as a form of men proving their courage, and external threats regarded as total wars (e.g. the Global War on Terrorism) strengthens certain ideas and attitudes about gender roles in the context of patriotic mobilization of the civilians.

A natural element of protecting the defenceless (i.e. in local context: women) is also their subordination (control). Nobody asks those who are to be saved (Muslim women in danger) from all the evil of this world (from Talibans, Al-Qa'ida, Saddam Hussein, the so-called Islamic State, that "dangerous Muslim") whether they want to be saved and whether it is to be by the hand of the "civilized" liberator (European/ American). Lila Abu-Lughod emphasizes that we need to be vigilant when neat cultural icons are plastered over more complicated historical and political dynamics. (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Róžalska, 2016)

In the realm of postcolonial feminism, efforts have been made to highlight the cause and effect relationship between racism and political, economic and cultural colonialism, and the non-white (non-western) woman who participates in political violence (Yuval-Davis 1997; Bulbeck 1998; Chowdhry & Nair, 2002; Berger & Guidroz 2009; McLeod, 2010). Still, the central dimension that is the focus of research on relations between communities and the state is the role of women. Such an approach underlines the importance of internal and external conditions of the postcolonial world as well as the racial/ethnic differences that affect the direction of action and the engagement and visibility of women in public space. Thus the trend of liberal feminism is subject to criticism, especially for its inclination to promote emancipation, its arrogance resulting from the sense of infallibility and superiority, and its tendency to conduct so-called "rescue actions" by "us" of those "others" whose position is often different and complicated due to poverty and backwardness.

One problem here is tagging and generalization (e.g. „all Arabs”) and the exposure of the term "nation." In the Western world, this term, alongside nationalism, is usually a historical fact and these were the main driving forces of independence movements, building state identity and

creating the concept of a nation state with defined borders (Yuval-Davis & Athias, 1983) “White” feminists and activists of aid organizations are accused of a lack of understanding of the very specific and multifaceted conditions in other regions. This rings especially true when they emphasize oppression in traditional cultures and patriarchal systems, which – in their view – objectify women, “oppressing” their personality and development. The effort to “save” that suppressed and passive woman, modeled on Western solutions, ignores the spectrum of diverse roles and positions of women in non-European cultures. (Tripp, 2002)

In the United States, the public debate on the participation of women in armed combat was connected to the events of the early 1990s (the Gulf War) and it revolved around issues such as the nature of war and gender differences, including competence and biological inclinations. The debate was influenced not only by ideological factors such as religious beliefs, but also political affiliation, perception of national security, social status (including affiliations to the military) and education, familiarity with feminist issues and attitudes towards feminism. These made up a wide range of conditions for dominant assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes, and myths about what is perceived as masculine and what is perceived as feminine, thus shaping what was “natural” or “adequate” to gender roles and behaviours (Code, 1991). The presence of women in the army does not affect the effectiveness on the battlefield nor does it hinder combat capabilities. Nor were any differences in ensuring security confirmed in instances of women participating in other militarized formations. (Woodward & Duncanson, 2017)

The history of women involved in armed conflicts exhibits, according to Linda Grant DePauw, four distinguishable roles. The first role consists of performing a traditional function in which a woman, while also being a victim, encourages the combat. The second role is associated with the type of courage that is described as “male,” where the woman focuses on survival and her position does not undermine the stereotyped perceptions of gender (female leader, mother, protector of the family home, woman working in the arms industry). Then there are women who fulfil auxiliary and nursing roles on the battlefield (e.g. nurses, couriers). Finally there’s the role of the soldier when in special historical moments women were permitted to perform male functions (DePauw, 1998: 17-25). Also Jean Bethke Elshtain does not dismiss the idea of women performing roles that are shaped by culture and relate to social constructs of man as “*Just Warrior*” and woman as “*Beautiful Soul*” (Elshtain, 1987). These assumptions are inconsistent with the concept proposed by Sara Ruddick which is based on *maternal thinking* and *caring*. For example, Ruddick

distinguished three stereotypical identities that can be observed in women in times of war: *mater dolorosa*, *outsider* and *peacemaker*, while assuming that these may overlap or interfere with one other. *Mater dolorosa* is the image of a mother of sorrows, who holds the family together and has the potential to reconstruct the social structure in communities affected or ravaged by war. It is the most deeply rooted image of a woman in the context of war. The *outsider* persona is a woman who is, by force or by choice, alienated from the men's war as war is attributed to masculinity. War is perceived as a form of extraordinary misogyny that induces, validates, and rewards behaviours which lead to violence against women. Finally, the *peacemaker* identity exhibits skills related to building relations and resolving conflicts in a non-violent way. In this approach, war is an inherent element of culture (war culture); counteracting it should focus on 1) introducing social changes, in line with the premise that women have the ability to build relations in a peaceful manner, and 2) promoting maternal thinking among men (Ruddick, 1998). Cynthia Enloe, however, disputes such an approach warning that the peaceful attitude limits the impact on militarized masculinity. Limiting or reducing one to the role of the mother may reinforce certain social norms and hence perpetuate the roles of each gender within the realm of war. Enloe also doubts a real change in the very essence of war and the military can occur through an active participation of women soldiers as their percentages are not high enough to battle sexism that comes with militarism. (Enloe, 1983: 17)

Liberal feminism is making the argument that equal rights of women and men also apply to women participating in military activities in the same scope as men. At the same time, it expresses the hope that the participation of women in armed forces could lead to a transformation of those hierarchical structures in a direction of democratic and equality standards. Then there are radical feminists who are among the biggest supporters of women's military service. Radical feminism, in a way, tries to free women from their corporeality by painting a vision of androgyny (bisexuality). New regulations and trends regarding mainly women's reproductive capacities (abortion, in vitro fertilization, birth control) and customs (polygamy, free relationships) enable women to grow in all areas of life, including the sphere of the military. Men's and women's features are losing importance. Noticeably, though, it is the women who adopt masculine behaviours not features who benefit from the concept of bisexuality. It allows them to function effectively in a world based on male-centred notions, because behaviours can undergo modification. In contrast, copying male traits still causes dissonance between that expression and biological sex. Military

service can be a liberation from patriarchy and an expression of solidarity among women echoing the idea of “sisterhood.” A woman-soldier strengthens the position of women. These assumptions, however, did not hold when confronted with reality. Throughout the centuries, limited access to the military meant to guarantee a *status quo* of male dominance in almost all cultures, not only those strictly patriarchal. Modern armies continue to perpetuate stereotypical gender roles, block the promotion of women and frown upon their active participation in military operations. The illusions of equality and departure from ossified hierarchical structures that replicate the foundations of patriarchal systems turned out to be just that – illusions (D’Amico, 1998). Notably, conflicts tend to employ the notions of sexuality and stereotypes on the biological perception of women. Joshua P. Goldstein talks of means that stimulate men’s engagement in the fight, some aimed at the enemy, some raising morale. Positive stimulation includes prostitution that accompanies military operations, images of young scantily clad women (so-called pin-up girls) that trigger intense desire (and therefore the soldier’s masculinity), pornography, reinforcing the phallic symbolism of weapons and the myth of protecting women from danger. Methods and techniques used to feminize the enemy include primarily degrading epithets and actions, such as executions of the male community, castration, enslavement and rape – both on women and men. (Goldstein 2001: 331-371)

The so-called male gaze, encountered in analyses of the role and significance of women in the context of political violence, centralizes the processes of representations wherein the male point of view is foregrounded. The term itself was coined in 1973 by Laura Mulvey and published in the prestigious “Screen” magazine in 1975. It refers primarily to the way women are presented through the prism of the privileged male (and heterosexual) spectatorial position within visual arts and literature (Mulvey, 1975). This approach indicates an unequal power relationship and the objectification of women, but it works in both ways, having an influence – usually a different or opposite one – on both the observed and the observer. There is clear emphasis on women as objects which are pressured by social norms, religion, race and a “sense of hopelessness” to certain acts and behaviours in the public sphere. Women are not perceived as individuals who are responsible for themselves and able to take independent decisions and create their own narratives. This is often due to the fact that it is a man who is telling the stories of those women, denying them the right to have a voice (his story instead of her story). While the image of harm and suffering is highlighted, at the same time a thought out choice of particular actions in the public/political sphere is contested (Tickner 1997b; Wibben, 2011). Some, especially advocates of feminist empiricism, emphasize that

presenting history while excluding the participation of women, as researchers and as narrators of own experiences, is largely incomplete. A reconstruction of any historical event should take into account women's issues. The history of women and the history of men should not be treated as separate as they in fact complement each other. The study of positions, roles and relations of women in the events that shape the political sphere contributes to the development of various research disciplines, not only the science of politics or security.

Conclusions

Among the various feminist factions, certain common elements regarding security studies can be distinguished. Firstly, the feminist approach uses, as its research method, critical analysis of existing paradigms, theories, concepts and language. The main goal is to avoid in scientific considerations a certain kind of "male skew." The feminist approach assumes that using the gender variable (cultural sex) and including the experiences of women in the analysis of political life and security issues leads to a fuller study of the public space and the interactions within it. Traditional theories of political sciences marginalize the significance of women, as well as the role of gender as a category of social and political life, by, for example, employing a simplification in the form of individual-citizen-man. This generalization also applies to security studies. The dominant stereotypical thinking, the replicating of patriarchal structures and the perpetuated masculinization of militarism do not encourage scholars to take a feminist perspective. This is largely due to the perpetuation of the hegemony of men in the community of researchers and overzealous censors who have the power to interpret and shape reality. Assuming that gender is a social construct related to the assignment of roles and norms, it is also related to the identity of the individual, their social identity and way of life. It has an impact on the distribution of power, privilege and prestige. The system of gender roles and their inter-relationships conditions every aspect of human life, including security and political violence. The primary mission of feminism is to raise awareness and thus strive for the inclusion of the place and position of women, not in contrast to men, but on equal terms in relation to both scientific theory and the practice of social life. At the same time, the role of quantitative research is being marginalized as those are perceived as a patriarchal tool that confines the science within the male vision.

The gender category is of importance in studying the entirety of security issues, including the conditions and processes that shape the genesis, structure and functioning of individual security systems. Consequently, proponents of the feminist perspective also point out that, at least within political science, avoidance of the gender aspect excludes from research certain determinants and processes that are essential to the world of politics. The feminist theories and gender lens can also be used to analyse security-related phenomena such as armed conflicts and non-military threats. A feminist approach can broaden the scope of analysis of motives behind women undertaking certain particular actions, which thus allows researchers to showcase the specificity of security-related behaviours. It should be emphasized that “including women,” their perspectives and experiences, does not mean the marginalization of men. Adding a female perspective is complementary and warranted since in traditional scientific research their role and significance have been omitted. However, the ideal of objectivity of science might still remain out of reach since cultural sex may condition the cognitive perspective of the male or female researcher.

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