



Feminist Criticism of Current Security Practices

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WILPF is an international civil society organisation that aims to bring about feminist peace, which means structural and social equality for all people. WILPF aims to lobby for women's rights and peace that includes demilitarization and non-violent conflict solutions. This statement elaborates on our feminist understanding of security and warns about prevalent security policies and practices.

'Security' is both concept and practice.

Classic approaches to security revolve around war, national security, threats and military response as a means of protection as well as a so-called peacebuilding effort. Most security practices performed today through national militaries, police, border guards and the like build their understanding of security on concepts developed in post-1945 world politics of bipolarity (so-called 'Cold War'). It follows the logic of state A posing a threat to state B. This perception is still deeply entrenched in today's understanding of security. The central security perception seems to follow the causality: the higher the national defense apparatus, the higher the state can provide with security and, therefore, with more peace. This is a fraud assumption, as conflict onsets and violent escalations have increased since the end of the Cold War.¹

Critical security approaches, to be found in the Copenhagen School for instance, have widened the analytical scope of what counts as a security issue. One of the most prominent concepts resulting from this school is the process of securitization². That is, the identification and framing of a threat without leaving room for further (public) discussion regarding the nature of the declared threat(s). Securitization seems to be linked to constructing a hegemonic concept that either includes transformation of the security discourse or can take place within a given security order³. Whether or not a matter poses a security threat is then limited to high-level security actors. Securitization reflects on the policy making process and can lead to the depoliticization of a debate, which results in securitized policies rather than on targeting underlying political, social or judicial issues, such as the "war on terror".

Feminist concept of 'security'

Feminist critical approaches challenge classic security through

¹ "United Nations; World Bank. 2018. Pathways for Peace : Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO."

² Buzan, B.; Waever, O.; de Wilde, J. (1998): Security. A new framework of analysis. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

³ Stengel, F. A. (2019). Securitization as Discursive (Re) Articulation: Explaining the Relative Effectiveness of Threat Construction. *New Political Science*, 41(2), 294-312.



- Interrogating implicit power imbalance between the ones defining threats (oftentimes national governments) and the ones defined as threats, consequently this leads to looking behind the definition of threats: Who gets to define them and what are the implications on these definitions.
- Looking behind mainstream security narratives, especially where they begin and end, what events such as 'crises' they involve and how these (may) produce "othering" or dehumanization.
- Stressing an intersectional analysis of what are the impacts of these policies and especially on who, as well as who is excluded? Since many groups, such as women, marginalized groups, races, ethnicities, migrants or stateless people are often overlooked.
- Bringing identity in the picture of political decision making and policy designing.
- Negating the perception that any form of militarization lead to less violence or peace.
- Reframing policies away from security and towards peace as militarized actions and defense mechanisms are difficult to justify under the latter one.

A feminist approach to security is about alternative conceptions of power, cooperative security arrangements and perspectives that go beyond state-centrism and militarisation⁴ and include the individual and the question of identity⁵.

However, several UN, EU and OSCE measures/programs/resolutions follow the idea of including more women when debating issues regarding women, peace and security. But adding women to decision-making processes and the armed forces or replacing men by women does not automatically lead to a 'pacification', prevention of violence, or improvement of security or peace processes.⁶ Including women in the security equation does not imply reconceptualizing current security practices as they are permeated with conceptions of masculinist protectionism, hegemonic and militarized masculinities. Feminists call for analyzing the roots of these conceptions instead of just 'feminizing' the field. These analyses and readjustments in the field require us to look at structural implications.

To illustrate the above shortly discussed theoretical approaches of securitization, we look at three major institutions that engage in international security issues:

Security approach in the OSCE

The concept of the OSCE's comprehensive security encompasses three dimensions: Politico-military, Economic and Environmental and Human Dimension. Although the organization claims for these three to work cross-dimensionally, the OSCE has strengthened its focus on the politico-

4 Wibben, A., T. R. (2010). Feminist security studies. In M. Dunn Cavelty & V. Mauer (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of security studies*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge.

5 Wibben, A. T. (2010). *Feminist security studies: A narrative approach*. Routledge.

6 See United Nation Security Council Resolution 1325 at peacewomen.org.



military dimension over the past 10 to 15 years. Initially, the OSCE was not designed to function as a military/militarized organization, it nowadays has an impact on border management, arms control, conflict and peace building, policing and counter terrorism action. The following example captures the OSCE's state-centric security approach in the context of its border management program: "Borders can be both open and secure: open to allow for the cross-border flow of legitimate trade and commerce, and secure in the sense that the national security interests of states are protected".⁷

Women, Peace and Security Agenda of the United Nations

The Security Council Resolution 1325 of the United Nations represents the founding document of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. The underlying message however is not a feminist security approach but a representational one that focuses on special protection of women, increased participation of women in the military apparatus and within peace processes, and the prevention of armed conflict. Besides the preventive pillar, the agenda calls for making women visible instead of re-adjusting state-centered security approaches. Therefore, this agenda is to be seen as a women-add-on to the classical security approach only.

Security approach of the European Union:

The EU was originally formed in the name of integration and collaboration of states on the European continent. In 1999, it integrated its 'Common Security and Defense Policy' and adopted its first security strategy in 2003. with which it started to focus on outside threats and security issues in response to 'new international security threats' after 9/11. Now, the EU functions as a common securitization collective and identifies common threats or insecurity, such as terrorism, migration, energy or climate change.⁸ The EU is an active member in global militarized action. To name some, several troops are deployed to peacekeeping missions and border control is outsourced a border- control-and defense agency (Frontex). In addition, the EU has been debating the setup of a European Army for several years now. All of this only marginally, if at all, touches upon the aspect of defense industries located in Europe.

Concluding

Taking these three institutions as examples of the prevalent security narrative, it is obvious that securitization processes are of larger concern. Securitization can be instrumentalized to justify an increase in defence infrastructure and military spending and to legitimize institutional action while making citizens feel threatened and scared. Feminist analysis and respective reframing of these narratives and alleged threats urgently need to be applied to prevent the political agenda from moving further towards positions which plays into the hands of the political right.

⁷ OSCE (2019): Border Management. [available from: <https://www.osce.org/border-management>]

⁸ Sperling, James & Webber, Mark. (2019). The European Union, Security Governance and Collective Securitization. West European Politics. 42. 228-260. 10.1080/01402382.2018.1510193.