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GENDER, CONFLICT AND REGIONAL SECURITY

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I. Introduction

Security considerations have become prominent in the world today owing to the complexity of relations between states and between individuals in the states inter se. The perception of security as primarily a state concern limits the analysis of the interpersonal dynamics that security or lack of it generates for individuals. This chapter examines the gender dynamics in regional security. It argues that gender as a relational concept, contributes significantly to an understanding of the causes and impacts of insecurity, and is also a critical factor in the search for solutions to insecurity.

The first part of the chapter defines the concepts of gender and regional security, emphasizing the different conceptualizations of the terms in different contexts. It also maintains that as a public good, the power relations between individuals and entities in a given context will determine access to security. The second part addresses the interface between regional security and gender looking at the causes and impacts of insecurity and the place of gender in the search for solutions to insecurity. It addresses the concepts of formal and substantive equality as important organizing principles in the discourse on gender and security. The third and last part concludes the chapter and suggests possible ways of addressing the absence of gender in the security discourse. It posits that national, regional and international security, as a public good, cannot be addressed outside the purview of individual security. To that extent, it is critical that gender considerations be taken into consideration and inform the search for security at different levels.

A. Gender, Security and Public Good

‘Gender’ means the state of being either male or female. The male and female genders define and characterize all human beings in society. The two genders are distinguished from one another by physical, that is, biological sexual/reproductive difference. The term has however increasingly acquired a social meaning where the word gender defines how the male and the female gender relate in society. The social meaning refers to social characteristics of one’s biological sex. These characteristics include gender-based division of labour whereby duties are allocated on the basis of one’s sex. For example, the female gender is allocated duties such as cooking, washing and other domestic chores which belong to the private rather than the public sector. The male gender is allocated non-domestic duties such as decision-making, bread winning and others, which belong to the public sector.¹

Thus contemporary discourses on gender entail not merely reference to the physical difference that being biologically male/female entails, but also the social constructions of maleness and femaleness which often translate into power relations between men and women. Sex then is distinguished from gender by what one is born as, that is female or male, and therefore is a biological concept. Culturally determined patterns of behaviour such as rights, duties, obligations and status assigned to women and men in society (gender roles) are varied even within the same society. Women’s studies are therefore a body of knowledge, which analyses the condition of women in society. When such studies are also directed to the changing of women’s condition in society, then such a body of knowledge is identified as feminist studies. Feminism is a political movement, which aims at transforming gender relations that are oppressive to women.

Feminist scholars use gender as an analytical variable. It denotes the manner in which women and men are differentiated and ordered in a given socio-cultural context. Sexuality is the interactive dynamic of gender as an inequality. As an attribute of a person, sex inequality takes the form of gender; as a relation between people, it takes the form of sexuality. Gender emerges as the congealed form of the sexualization of inequality between men and women. So long as this is socially the case, the feelings, acts or desires of particular individuals notwithstanding, gender inequality will divide their society into two communities of interest. The male centrally features in the hierarchy of control. For the female, subordination is sexualized, as is dominance for the male.

Gender is thus a relational concept, which describes how men and women by virtue of their socially constructed differences relate to phenomena around them. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles of men and women and to the interaction between them. It also includes the differentiation between men and women in terms of income, social status, literacy and other factors. It is an important analytical concept used to explain

the different learned identities associated with masculinity and femininity. The difference between men and women is always emphasized, and sex roles and responsibilities, are accepted and idealised as contrasting and complementary. In the realm of security, gender considerations can, for instance, be seen in terms of the roles played by men and women in ensuring security, and the impact of insecurity on men and women. In many instances the failure to accept the differences and the emphasis on equality tends to mask the differentiated roles and impacts of conflict. The situation is further compounded because gender considerations may be obscured by the more visible ethnic, racial and economic class differentiations. Hence the need to appreciate that even though gender considerations may not be universal, the dominance of men and masculinity is pervasive especially in patriarchal societies.

B. Regional Security

Generally speaking, security can be defined as the freedom from danger, fear or anxiety. Conflict situations are consequently a threat to security. Conflicts arise from human relations when individuals or groups have different values, needs and interests; or when resources are not available in unlimited quantities and access to them must be controlled and fought for.

In the context of state relations, security connotes the immunity, of a state from threats from outside territorial boundaries, or the preservation of minimum-core values of a state, namely-political independence and territorial integrity. Because of the interdependence of the international community, the lack of security in one state has implications for security in a region or even globally. To this extent therefore regional or international security is the collective interest of diverse regional or international actors respectively since the security of parts of the system is inextricably intertwined with the security of the whole.

Regional security is defined as an ideal type of order where members of a region attain a political nirvana by finding solutions to regional problem or sweeping them so firmly under the carpet that they do not re-emerge.² A major assumption in this rendition of regional security is that states have succeeded in managing or eliminating problems that create ethnic, communal sub-national and socio-economic antagonisms, which are often the cause(s) of conflict. There is also the assumption that there exist mechanisms within the community to deal with conflict when it occurs. The concept of regional security is more applicable in developed countries than in developing ones because the latter have more developed regional blocs. In developed parts of the world, there is also a greater linkage of individual states with system security unlike in developing countries where the sense of insecurity is internal. Indeed insecurity in developing countries is attributable to uneven economic development, glaring disparities in wealth and income and communal and ethnic tensions.³ The main actors in the security apparatus are men, while women only feature as peripheral support. The impacts of security or lack of it however, are felt by both men and women. Taking the argument that security in developing countries is influenced significantly by internal factors, it is immediately clear that gender relations are critical to an understanding of security in a given country or region.

C. Security and the Public Good

Security falls in the category of goods, which are public or collective consumption goods. All persons enjoy security in common and one individual's consumption does not subtract from another's. It is non-rivalrous in the sense that the consumption or enjoyment of protection or defence for a resident in a country does not detract from another resident's consumption of the protection.⁴ The protection is indivisible and its enjoyment by an additional person involves no marginal or additional cost. It is also non-exclusionary to the extent that no one "in the country can be excluded from benefiting from the protection regardless of whether they contribute directly to the defence budget. It therefore attracts free riders.

The public good aspect of security is normally discussed in the national context, but it is equally applicable to regional and international contexts. In the context of globalisation, security responsibilities are best carried out on a global scale by the international and regional public sectors. The question that arises is whether security

is a finite or an infinite good. The better view to take is that security is an infinite public good. The power relations in a given context will however determine the availability and enjoyment of security especially where the apparatus for ensuring it is within the control of a particular group, which does not take into account the interests of other groups.

II. Interface of Gender and Regional Security

Conflict and instability are driven by failures in governance, health issues and environmental degradation. Further, globalisation and technological change have increased interdependence and magnify security-related impacts of development challenges around the world. The lack of societal consensus on fundamental issues and unrepresentative and repressive states, coupled with the destabilizing impact of economic and social disparities results in conflicts between genders and within genders. These emerge in concert with other sources of tension. Inequalities among the genders are attributable to cultural perceptions of femininity and masculinity, which in turn may influence legal regimes. Women as a gender component of society have been systematically removed from fully participating in the development process despite their active participation in the production processes alongside men. This impinges on the capacity of women to impact on security in states and in regions. Women are therefore perceived as victims of insecurity rather than as actors with the capacity to contribute to the maintenance of security and its restoration when insecurity ensues. In an analysis of gender, armed conflict and political violence, Cockburn explains how in making war, men form the military groups and gangs of warlords for diverse reasons ranging from patriotism, honour, self-defence to liberation. She argues that male positioning in the patriarchal gender systems and masculine identities, underscore these reasons.⁵ Cleansing rituals may form part of the process of preparing for war or of political violence. In the ethnic clashes that occurred in Kenya in the 1990s, there was the call by some communities to return to cultural practices that they had discarded in an effort to 'cleanse' the community and eliminate factors that had brought about the destruction of the property of those communities. In certain areas, female genital mutilation was reintroduced. Militia groups that have terrorized Kenyans such as Mungiki also advocate female circumcision in an attempt to attain cultural purity.

Law to a great degree validates the exclusion of women from participation in the security apparatus and therefore denies them the chance to participate in the search for security at the national and international levels, Feminists' perception of law is that it is male and espouses male values. They argue that the defining characteristics of the legal person are closely related to the world-view of the socially powerful. This assertion has been made in reference to both international and national law. At national levels the best exemplification of the masculinity of laws is the tenor and application of gender-neutral laws. Thus while legal provisions are couched in gender-neutral language, the enjoyment of equal rights and privileges in practice is an elusive concept. Gender-neutral laws have, in many instances, resulted in de facto discrimination, As Dahl aptly points out,

*"As long as we live in a society where women and men follow different paths in life and have different living conditions, with different needs and potentials, rules of law will necessarily affect men and women differently. The gender-neutral legal machinery ... meets the gender-specific reality..."*⁶

At the international level, the point is poignantly made in reference to international humanitarian law, which it is argued

*Takes a particular male perspective on armed conflict, as a norm against which to measure equality. In a world where women are not equals of men, and armed conflict impacts upon men and women in a fundamentally different way, a general category of rules that is not inclusive of reality for women cannot respond to their situation.*⁷

In essence therefore, the notion of formal equality in the realm of the search for regional or national security and its suitability is questioned.

III. Equality and Equity

The legal regime on human rights is predicated on the notions of equality between women and men and equity. Equality between women and men relates to their dignity and worth, equality in their rights, opportunities to participate in political, economic, social and cultural development, and to benefit from the results.⁸ Equity on the other hand relates to fairness in the treatment of men and women. It refers to the possibility of inequality between men and women, which necessitates the application of differential treatment to get rid of inequality.⁹

It is recognized that gender inequality exists. There are some realms where women are under-represented or totally absent. The question is whether women and men have equal rights and opportunities to participate in, for instance, the maintenance of and search for security. If not, the hindrances to the participation of women need to be addressed. This latter question is one of equity. It raises the issues of formal and substantive equality.

Most theories of justice pursue the achievement of some form of equality as their ultimate goal. However, equality is an elusive concept since different versions of equality yield extremely different substantive outcomes. In industrial countries, the emphasis has historically been on “formal equality” where it is argued that all subjects of the law should be treated similarly. Rules are usually deemed to be just if they apply to all without discrimination. At both the individual and international level, formal equality seeks to give every member of the community equal opportunities.

The provision of formal equality as an ultimate policy goal may, under favorable conditions, produce an optimal aggregate outcome, such as a high rate of economic growth, but it does not take into account the welfare of disadvantaged individuals.¹⁰ Accordingly, even if national laws adopt a system built on the rule of law, in which women and men are treated equally, and where all have a chance to enjoy the rights provided for, the least favoured will continue to be relatively disadvantaged.¹¹ More generally, equality of rights or opportunities will not necessarily bring about equality of outcomes, especially in a world characterized by disparities in resources and opportunities.¹²

Legal systems are premised on the need to bring stability, coherence and foreseeability to human relations. One of the instruments used to regulate social conduct in large groups is the enactment of rules and standards. Different factors militate against a strict reliance on the principle of fixed rules applying uniformly to all. Firstly, the changing nature of society and human needs calls for progressive change in the legal system. Secondly the application of a general rule to a particular case may often necessitate the consideration of special factors and the balancing of the various interests at stake. There is thus a border area where enforcement agencies need to supplement gaps in existing rules. Thirdly, the fact that rules emanate from competent organs and have been taken in regular forms does not guarantee that the rules are equitable.

The search for an alternative basis to the principle of fixed rules leads to the old principle that like cases should be treated alike and that dissimilarly situated people should be treated dissimilarly.¹³ In Aristotle’s words,

*If they are not equal, they will not have what is equal, but this is the origin of quarrels and complaints-when either equals have and are awarded unequal shares, or unequals equal shares. Further, this is plain from the fact that awards should be ‘according to merit’; (or all men agree that what is just in distribution must be according to merit in some sense.*¹⁴

In other words, the fulfillment of formal equality may not bring about substantive equality. The realization of substantive equality requires that existing inequalities, such as inequalities in wealth or natural endowments be acknowledged. Further, discrepancies, which cannot be traced to individuals’ choices, should be taken into account and may constitute grounds for redistributive claims.¹⁵ The limits of the traditional notion of equity in law call for new approaches to the realization of substantive equality. Differential treatment constitutes one of the ways in which the principles of distributive justice can be implemented to foster the realization of substantive equality between men and women. Article 4 of the Convention on the Prevention of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) gives a basis for differential treatment. It requires that states adopt:

*temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved.*¹⁶

IV. Inequalities, Stability and Conflict

This section, explores three issues: the roles, experiences, needs and capabilities of women and men in conflict; gendered aspects of the causes of conflict at macro and micro levels; and the implications of a gender analysis for conflict management.

Both classical and behaviourist theorists of conflict have neglected the gender dimension in their analyses, thus excluding a very important paradigm in the analysis of causes and impacts of conflict and on the mechanisms used for managing conflict. The inequities between genders have implications for stability and conflict as they shape roles, expectations and interventions. Gender and gender roles are integral to socialization processes and are also influenced by myths/paradigmatic foci-assumptions, expectations, and obligations, connected to biological sex.¹⁷ These change, and are specific to a given culture, are affected by other different situations-race, ethnicity and class-and they help in the understanding the use and sharing of power and division of labour between women and men, and can define relationships between sexes. Further, they cut across public and private spheres and are institutionalised at different levels society, family and the state.

The shaping of values and norms in society is influenced by the stronger position that men in many societies around the world have had. Male bias and gender roles diminish and constrain the socio-economic position of women in most societies. Equal treatment at that level is not feasible or effective unless discriminating provisions are reversed. Indeed formal equality may only serve to reinforce the lower status of women.

Gender initiatives tend to focus on women and their advancement in society, economics and positions. They propose positive discrimination in institutions to achieve gender balance, addressing the extent to which women and men can hold the full range of positions in governance and development. It includes incorporating women into decision-making bodies. To this extent therefore, gender mainstreaming is not just about numbers, but about making women's and men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men may benefit equally.

Gender mainstreaming demands that there be a gender equality perspective incorporated in all policies at all levels and stages. Indeed a gender analysis elicits different questions about the causes and effects of insecurity on different-sectors society and the particular relationships and roles with each other. It provides a better understanding of unequal social hierarchies and inequality and oppression, which are in prevalent societies, experiencing conflict.

Gender equity and equality are therefore essential in building sustainable peace and reconstructing democratic processes since they capture gender-related issues in specific conflict situations. The use by international organizations of the gender related development index to adjust the human development index to reflect gender information (adjusting the human development index downwards for countries with a poor record in gender equality and making the average achievement of each country in life expectancy educational attainment and income in accordance with the degree of disparity in achievement between men and women)¹⁸ is a positive step towards ingraining gender considerations in human security issues.

A gender analysis of insecurity demands that the causes of expressed violence, frustration and demographic and behavioural change be analysed at an inter-personal level. This enables the isolation of the gender-based indications of violence within the economic, social and political domains.¹⁹ The inclusion of a gender perspective demands more than just adding and stirring gender into an initiative. It requires questioning the paradigmatic stances on femininity and masculinity and exploring how these create and maintain insecurity and how they can contribute to the cessation of such insecurity.

V. Causes of Insecurity

Causes of insecurity could be structural or systemic. Gender relations are structural and systemic because they form part of the general structure and deep-rooted background conditions. Although these have been in existence for a long time, they are dynamic. Cultures that limit women's access to resources and decision making power, and which characterise women as inferior to men, treat women as property and accept domestic violence as a norm have, for instance been said to be more prone to repression and violent conflict in the public arena. Exclusion and discrimination can however, not be limited only to social and cultural structures. They can also occur in the economic sphere where the exclusion of groups that are low in status form important resources can result in insecurity. Gender sensitive root causes of insecurity include political equality, economic equality and social equality.²⁰

Recent research suggests that states with lower percentages of women in parliament are more likely to use military violence to settle disputes and that a 5 per cent decrease in the proportion of women in parliament renders a state nearly five times as likely to resolve international disputes using military force.²¹ With regard to economic equality, the level of women's participation in the labour force impacts on a state's likelihood to use military force to resolve international conflict.²²

Depriving women of access to resources can also cause insecurity especially in contexts where women are key economic actors and require the resources to perform their daily chores. In such circumstances, the potential development of an individual or group is held back by the uneven distribution of power and resources. Armed conflict can result from such deprivation or be sustained by it as increases in inequality weaken the inhibitions against aggression.

The role of women in environmental management has been widely documented, as has the degradation of the environment. Changes in the environment have implications for security at different levels. In places where environmental resources provide both a subsistence and economic lifeline, such changes impact directly on gender relations. In many parts of the world, there is a growing appreciation among conflict policy makers of the environmental origins of conflict. Conflicts in Africa for instance, though often linked to political and communal differences, are now understood to have potentially important linkages with environmental factors. The link between environment and security is accepted at high levels of government. In this respect former US Secretary of State Christopher noted that:

*"The environment has a profound impact on our national interests in two ways: first, environmental forces transcend borders and oceans to threaten directly the health and prosperity, and jobs of American citizens, Second, addressing natural resources issues is frequently critical to achieving political and economic stability, and to pursuing our strategic goals around the world."*²³

Similarly, a former Rwandese Minister of Defence stated that:

*'Environmental causes of major significance in this context [the Rwanda conflict] are natural resource linked and are due to population pressure, to decline of agricultural land per family land-holding..., to soil degradation and to shortage of firewood.'*²⁴

The widening recognition that there are environmental underpinnings to conflict is strengthened, in part, by the ineffectiveness of many mechanisms for preventing and managing conflicts. In many cases these do not promote the peaceful negotiation of competing interests.

At the regional level, the role of environmental resources in security is well illustrated by the shared waters of the River Nile. While there has been an international agreement regulating these waters, the question of equity has come into sharp focus as states that are deprived of the waters have begun to question the fairness of the international agreement. The Nile Basin Initiative, an inter-governmental initiative seeks to ensure that Nile waters are used as a basis for cooperation rather than a basis for conflict. While the shared vision programme takes care of the interests of diverse states, it is critical that the interests of individuals in the Nile waters are taken into consideration since regional security cannot be achieved without national and individual security.

VI. Impact of Insecurity

At the onset of armed conflict, the increase in militarization and the quantity of weapons inflow may be accompanied by requirements on the part of both men and women to serve in compulsory military service. As armed conflict still tends to be largely masculine, men are at risk of being targeted as combatants, forcibly recruited or being either killed or imprisoned purely on the basis of their gender to pre-empt opponents from building a strong resistance force. During the build up to war, 'gender-stereo-types and specific definitions of masculinity and femininity are often promoted.'²⁵ Further, the rights of individual men and women will be subjected to censorship. Laws, limits on their freedom of expression and movement under the guise of national security. Depending on the gender relations in the particular state, women are likely to be more impacted on owing to their already lower status in society.

Militarization on account of perceived insecurity often takes place at the expense of spending on public services such as health and education, and this in turn impacts on women and men spending, and on the power relations in a particular state. The expenditure by most African states of their national resources on arms is done at the expense of other services that would improve overall human security based on human needs such as poverty alleviation, food security and shelter. The traditional focus on national security based on military issues relegates women's concerns and interests to the margins and is untenable if lasting solutions to insecurity are to be found.

The build up of aggression in the period preceding open conflict fuels aggressive behaviour at all levels, from domestic violence, bar-fights and vandalism. Violence against groups that are low in status, or allegations of such violence at the hands of the enemy or out-group may become a deliberate way of achieving in-group cohesion. Violent acts against women, such as rape, may be committed in order to punish, demoralise and symbolically defeat men.

In situations of armed conflict, the role of women as producers and reproducers are highly politicised because women ensure survival and make it possible for the war to go on. The pressure on women to continue performing their traditional roles is increased as masculinity and femininity are reconstructed to fit into the prevailing situation. The situation of war even for men who do not go to war leads to humiliation that is translated into a greater exercise of authority in the private domain, which may be the only, remaining bastion of authority for the male.

Women and girls are deliberate targets of contemporary civil wars. Rape and sexual assaults are often used as strategic weapons. Sexual violence is an act of humiliation against a woman and her male relatives. The frontlines of battle are often in the villages where women carry out their daily chores. The state of war can thus significantly impact on women's access to resources.²⁶ Another impact of insecurity is the increase in female-

headed households once men go to war. The catapulting of women into family headship without a concomitant investment in equipping them to perform those tasks leads to the further impoverishment of such women. The situation is worse where the women are forcibly displaced into refugee camps with more limited resources and further constrained in accessing basic resources including food, healthcare and education. Where the environment is degraded or natural resources are destroyed as a consequence of war, the capacity and ability of women to perform the tasks expected of them is further negatively impacted on.

VII. Conclusion

The quest for national, regional and international security calls for the marshalling of all available resources. The principles that should guide conflict prevention and amelioration strategies include efficient democratic systems which take into account socio-cultural realities of each state: systems of government based on permanent social dialogue and the quest for political consensus; a judicial system that is accessible to all and perceived as independent of the state: respect for human rights; eradication of exclusion: and policies that address issues such as debt, regional integration, women, children and cultural identity.

Including a gender perspective in that process is critical if the causes and impacts of insecurity are to be holistically tackled. There is a need to move from region and state-centric security to individual security. This calls for the analysis of actors in states in order to reveal economic, social, political, and ethnic and gender nuances of security. It would also entail including a variety of causes, inequality, inequity, environmental degradation, environmental abundance, human rights violations and bad governance.

Gender considerations need to be integrated in conflict and peace management. The fourth world conference on women in Beijing in 1995 called for the increased access by women to conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, and raised the consciousness of international policymakers about women's role in peace and in creating conditions of trust and confidence among conflicting parties. The Platform for Action states that:

“In a world of continuing instability and violence... the equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in the prevention and resolution of conflicts are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.”²⁷

Further, Resolution 1325 (2000) of the United Nations Security Council reaffirmed that a gender perspective in conflict and conflict prevention and resolution needs to include measures that support women's peace initiatives. At the implementation level the resolution calls for the involvement of women in all implementation mechanisms of peace agreements and ensuring the human rights of women and girls particularly those related to constitutions, electoral systems and judiciaries. This is a watershed resolution that calls on states and all actors to ensure women's full participation in peace processes.

The European Union and other regional and multilateral organizations have adopted similar policies and replicated the resolution. The challenge remains the actualization of the resolution through practical measures. The gender perspective should be an integral part of the basic effort of devising more effective policies and targeting aid more efficiently. It also points to the need to address the core causes of conflict taking into account the needs of different stakeholders, and assessing the potentials for interventions for different actors. In integrating the gender perspective in the search for security, it is critical that a determination be made on who has access to and control over the resources, actors and factors that are pivotal to conflict. The main challenge is to negotiate competing needs, claims, and rights. Local equitable ownership of tools and techniques for addressing of conflict is critical if these are to be effectively employed as part of conflict prevention and management. Central to these is the recognition and guarantee of the rights of diverse actors. A rights-based approach ensures the incorporation of the interests of all in dealing with conflicts, especially where these are inseparable from grievances rooted in the uneven distribution of resources.

Endnotes

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