

Book Review

Gender, Violence, and Human Security: Critical Feminist Perspectives

Aili Mari Tripp, Myra Marx Ferree, and Christina Ewig (Eds). New York & London: New York University Press, 2013. 336 pages

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The term “security” has conventionally referred to the critical tasks of nation-states and military defense associated with typical masculine image, and it is regarded to have little connection with feminism or gender analysis. When the UNDP (United Nations Development Plans) suggested new dimensions of “human security” in 1994, however, this heralded a kind of paradigm shift in security research and triggered extended discussions on the relations between gender and human security. Indeed, we are living in a world saturated with multiple forms of insecurities, not only economic destitution and threats of war but also more unpredictable and invisible risks of environmental disasters and global polarization. Security has to be redefined as a continuum encompassing all levels of social life and power relations, not as a black-and-white dichotomy of war or peace. In this regard, gender does matter in the analysis of human security and policy resolution for secure lives of women and men, although gender is not the only relationship that matters.

This book -- *Gender, violence and human security* -- explores “the relationship between human security and gender, with particular attention to violence at all levels of organization” (p. 5), based on a critical feminist perspective. The first chapter provides an overall review on the conceptual history of human security and also theoretical consideration for bringing feminist perspectives into human security analysis. The co-authors of this book cover quite a wide range of gendered violence in diverse cultural contexts: human trafficking in Thailand, honor killing in Islamic culture, sexual violence and state response in the US, and protection of vulnerable women and girls in the context of war and

post-conflict situations.

Analysis of gender-based violence has relied on the human rights frame, arguing that women's rights are human rights. In response to this, several questions may arise rather naturally: why do we need a human security perspective instead of human rights, and how can this broader human security frame contribute to advance gender analysis? To answer this question, we need a long and complicated review of conceptual history, which would perhaps be suitable for another article. As an alternative to such a review, I'd like to point out several descriptions and author's discontents with the human rights frame that this book suggests. In the introductory chapter, Aili Mari Tripp emphasizes that the focus of this book is on "forms of insecurity that are not encompassed in frameworks of either human development or human rights, nor in the traditional state security framework."

This book relies heavily on the definition of human security provided by UNDP. According to the UNDP report, human security is a lens framing a number of disparate policy initiatives to be linked, and to be given greater coherence. "It proposed means of framing threats to human security with reference to the principles of freedom from fear and freedom from want." With this dual definition, human security involves not only protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in patterns of daily life, but also safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression. Furthermore, it compartmentalized threats to human security into seven components: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security (UNDP, 1994, pp. 22-25).

In the concluding chapter, Myra Marx Ferree effectively sums up the limits of the human rights approach: "Human rights discourse is, as has been noted earlier, individualizing, legalistic, and retroactive" (p. 303). Although human rights discourse aims to guarantee basic human needs founded on the ideal of universal and inclusive humanism, it often falls into nothing but an individual protection in a given legal order, and tends to designate the vulnerable subjects (mostly women and children) as helpless victims. I completely agree with Tripp and Ferree that a human security frame provides broader theoretical room for gender analysis than a human rights perspective, particularly with regard to two aspects. First, as the human rights frame tends to distinguish the vulnerable minorities from the responsible majorities, conventional security

discourse can be used to emphasize the role of a strong state and to depict women and the private sector as vulnerable. Therefore, women and the private sector need to be protected by a strong army and state bureaucrats that are able to mobilize resources and organize institutions to find solutions for the vulnerable. The human security frame introduces an alternative approach that can imagine women not only as victims but as active agents to discover their own voice and engage in actions to recover peace, to organize care relations in various levels of communities.

Second, broader concepts of human security contribute to open up gender analysis by interconnecting macro and micro-level research. For example, women's poverty cannot be reduced to the individual level of education, lack of human capital, or unemployment of their fathers and husbands, but needs to be reflected in the overall picture of labor market structure affected by global redistribution of resources and wealth, state policy favoring foreign investment at the expense of welfare provision for poor families and children, or improper response to environmental change and natural disasters. Following the Commission on Human Security (CHS)'s definition, the aim of human security is "to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment" (CHS, 2003, p. 4). Gender based violence is by no means left in a concealed corner of a private home or on the fringes of certain ethnic and racial ghettos. Referring to the human security frame, feminists could argue against diverse forms of gendered violence as major assaults against the vital core of all human lives that acutely transgress freedom from fear. In this regard, Ferree strategically interprets the human security frame as having affinity with the viewpoints of intersectional feminism.

I think the vital core of this book is an encounter of intersectional feminist ideas with the human security frame. Ferree properly mentions that "gendering human security will be most useful if it consciously critical of binary views of gender that are popularly available and being mobilized politically to defend 'traditional' values of men and women." (p. 297). In other words, intersectional feminism challenges the conventional us-them binary of needy victims and empowered rescuers. If we examine women's experiences through the lens of human security articulated with an intersectional feminist frame, it would engender new criti-

cism on conventional policies and institutions, inspiring feminist alternatives.

Lisa D. Brush's article dealing with poor and battered women and related state policies in the US provides an interesting example of gender analysis articulated with a human security frame. She explains that thousands of women in the US are caught in the double trap of poverty and abuse, and these women are usually responded to with two different aspects of the security state: the law-and-order state is central to the "freedom from fear" portion of the definition of human security, and the social security state provides welfare benefits to cover "freedom from want." However, the U.S. law-and-order security state established by the police and courts is far from perfect, according to Brush's analysis. For example, the percentage of men killed by their wife or girlfriend fell from 10.4 percent in 1980 to 4.9 percent in 2008, a 53 percent drop. For women, the percentage killed by their husband or boyfriend increased 5 percent across the same period. The lives saved by the law-and-order state system are disproportionately men's, so it provides only an illusion of security in an insecure world. On the other hand, the social security system offers mothers meager cash and in-kind benefits, simultaneously imposing working requirements and an intrusive surveillance system to enforce conventional gender norms to beneficiary women. Seen from a gender perspective, the law-and-order and welfare security state consequently led to nothing but a gendered "insecurity" state.

This book contains successful examples of gender research linking the human security frame with intersectional feminist ideas, but it cannot avoid several criticisms. First, many authors pointed out the conceptual uncertainty of human security. "This uncertainty is rooted in at least three problematic themes which emerge from the discourse on human security within the UN: the confusion between human security and development, the overlap between human security and human rights, and conceptual overstretch." (Martin and Owen, 2010: 216) Tripp seems to provide a very simple answer to this complicated question: human rights and human security are complementary concepts. But we need more elaboration on the mapping of adjacent concepts of human rights, human development, and human security to prevent false priorities and hopes and to fix causal confusion.

Last but not least, this book's argument that "human security is an attractive normative frame for feminists" (p. 20) should be reconsidered and supplemented by further theoretical examination. It is true that a strong point of human security frame is that it highlights the agency of those affected by insecurity and focuses on positive action to expand human capabilities rather than merely defending human rights. In this regard, human security perspective composes a normative attitude similar to a feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding, 2004), stressing careful listening to the voice of women subjects instead of imposing causal axioms from above. To develop a feminist normative frame, however, we are still in need of more inclusive reflection, particularly on the articulation of human security with classic concepts of gender equality, gender hierarchy, care and feminist ethics, and so on.

Again, this book is full of creative ideas to secure a feminist perspective in accordance with the increasing diversity of women subjects within multiple cultural contexts. "Just as feminists of the 1970s had to draw attention to the issues of violence and redistribution within households by mobilizing around battering and housework, feminists today need discursive tools for drawing attention to the linkage between macro- and micro levels of intersectional insecurities for women and men." (p. 292) To make the linkage work, this book provides exciting tools of discursive politics to stimulate new interpretations of typical stories of violence against women, as well as providing a strategic standpoint for gendered analysis of institution and policy.

References

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