CHAPTER 2
RETHINKING HUMAN SECURITY: THE IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING
Desiree Lewis

Introduction

Traditionally, human security has been explored using gender-blind notions of individual, communal and national wellbeing. Although gender is routinely invoked in current scholarship and practice, its inclusion is often formulaic and ad hoc. Frequently, ‘gender’ is mechanically equated with ‘women’, and the writers tend to add women to existing accounts by superficially and erratically invoking their experiences.

What, therefore, are the broad theoretical, conceptual and methodological implications of gender mainstreaming in discussions about human security? The challenges are vast, although feminist interventions – while still marginalised in malestream discussions – have grown steadily. What follows is an overview of some salient areas that warrant scrutiny if gender is to be mainstreamed in human security studies. The three areas identified raise the need for far-reaching conceptual, theoretical and methodological explorations. They highlight the fact that gender mainstreaming does not simply entail appending ‘gender’ to existing studies; an effort must be made to redefine mainstream thought and practice on human security.

Expanding the notion of ‘human security’

Sexual violence, although rampant in so many societies, has been labeled a private and domestic matter that falls outside of public discussion and much of the human security discourse. Yet the most basic security, bodily and personal integrity, is denied to those women of different classes throughout the world who have experienced sexual violence. Guaranteeing women’s human security requires that we be open about, and challenge, the many forms of gender-based violence in our diverse societies. It also involves rethinking the circumstances, practices and relationships that affect the human security of over half the world’s population.

Many of the practices that determine women’s human security are connected to the private realm and to domestic and interpersonal relationships. For
example, ‘home’ for many abused women is a site of profound insecurity, and violence within the home totally contradicts conventional views that associate danger and risk with public spaces. Those familial and marital relationships in which incest and wife-battering routinely occur must encourage us to rethink conventional assumptions about which actions violate human security, and the contexts in which these violations happened. Generally, holistic thinking about security requires us to consider safety within domestic spheres, safety from violence perpetrated by partners, husbands or fathers, safety at places of work, and the safety that allows women to in participate as full citizens.

This expanded understanding of human security pushes back the boundaries of security studies, and can encourage us to rethink many basic concepts in security studies discourse, such as ‘conflict’, ‘peace’ or ‘aftermath’. In fact, in an article provocatively titled, ‘There is no aftermath for women’, Sheila Meintjies, Anu Pillay and Meredith Turshen point out that the notion of ‘post-conflict’ for women is often a misnomer when we consider how pervasive gender-based violence is.¹

Gender-based violence has become an increasingly visible issue in international lobbying for human rights. Several provisions within Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) apply to gender-based violence and the Beijing Platform for Action provides a discourse and strategy for responding to it. The Vienna Declaration and Platform for Action on Violence Against Women calls on governments and the United Nations to take action against such violence, while the SADC Gender Declaration Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women commits governments in the SADC region to addressing violence through legislation, budget allocation, education and service provision.

All these documents imply mounting international action to correct the historical silencing of sexual violence. Yet the trend has been to turn gender-based violence into a sectoral concern, rather than to treat it as being integral to broad considerations of human security. It is revealing, for example, that a recent ISS publication, *The Many Faces of Human Security: Case Studies of Seven Countries in Southern Africa*,² does not touch on gender-based violence, despite the fact that this region’s incidence of rape and domestic violence are amongst the world’s highest, and despite the fact that much research and advocacy has been done in this field.

Taking gender-based violence into account extends conventional understandings of human security. It can also deepen investigations of the
gendered dimensions of subjects more frequently explored in human security studies, such as militarism, ethnic formation and conflict, and nationalism. It is noteworthy that one of the most influential analyses of the Rwandan genocide, Mamdani’s *When victims become killers: colonialism, nativism and the genocide in Rwanda*, systematically ignores gender themes such as masculinity, patriarchal ideologies or links between sexual ascendancy and political power.

Yet, as various commentators have shown, conflicts in states like Rwanda are deeply rooted in gender relations, identities and ideologies. In particular, gender violence, in the form of rape, sexual torture and sexual slavery, has played a central part in ‘ethnic cleansing’ and the definition of collective identities along gendered lines. This not only leads us to consider how women experience unique forms of violation during war. It also indicates that gendered identities are central to the formation of other group identities, such as national and ethnic identity. Fully understanding and responding to patterns such as militarism and ethnic conflict therefore require an exploration of gendered identity-formation.

A perspective that takes into account gender-based violence unmasks the limited understandings of human security, and involves introducing new contexts, concepts and relationships into the human security discourse. Integrating human security work with gender-based violence, whether in the form of research, networking or advocacy, would involve institutes and centres networking with women’s organisations (i.e. networking at the local level, rather than solely in terms of inter-agency or inter-state collaboration, or through the high-profile, international networking on which many security studies centres seem to concentrate). Or it would involve systematically addressing studies of gender-based violence (studies which shift the emphasis of politics to the personal, the immediate, the everyday, and away from what is large-scale, national and momentous). And, this, in view of the origin of human security in emphatically masculine and state-centric political studies or security studies, would entail a significant paradigm shift.

**Important factors in analysing human security**

The emphasis on human security during the past decade has introduced a people-centred emphasis and involved a movement away from the previous fixation with the threat of nuclear holocaust, territorial boundaries and state-centric and militaristic solutions. Human security involves focusing on individuals and recognising the diverse factors that pose threats of want
and fear, which includes states, internal conflict, human rights abuses, environmental deterioration, poverty and oppression, and disease and malnutrition. Attention to these diverse factors has generated a growing radicalism in security studies.

At the same time, however, human security agendas are being defined by policy within the framework of multilateral governance and neo-liberal globalisation, as reflected in the growing use of the term ‘human security’ by the United Nations since its Human Development Report of 1994. Canada, as an advocate of ‘soft power’, has often been recognised as leading the non-militaristic and progressive human security approach. In contrast to the United States’ militaristic approach to foreign relations, the Canadian approach seems critical of the global order and of methods driven by donors and the West. Yet, it is important to recognise the limitations of even Canadian-type progressive approaches. For example, Rosalind Boyd raises the problem of how the Canadian government’s commitment to human security can coexist with the growing clampdown on refugees and asylum seekers in recent years.4

The important point here is that human security discourses have multiple origins and manifest many political and ideological ambivalences. In particular, as a field of policymaking and research, human security agendas have been very vulnerable to state and multilateral policymaking that sets limits on which freedoms are important to human security.

Neo-liberal economic models and market-driven policies are intensifying poverty, food insecurity, and economic exclusion for the majority. At the same time, US-driven military intervention is playing an increasingly dominant role in multilateral policy. Certain human security discourses often reflect, even if indirectly, these conservative trends. Gendered perspectives can invigorate the radical edge to human security studies and guard against the danger of its becoming a field of conservative and largely ameliorative policy-making. In fact, feminist interventions in traditional security studies have been central to the revolutionary thrust of critical security studies. As Heidi Hudson shows in her article, ‘A feminist reading of security in Africa’5 feminist critics, like Cynthia Enloe,6 pioneered the shift towards a much more inclusive and incisive understanding of the factors that impact on human security. Gender theories have been important for two main reasons. One is that they have focused attention on marginalisation and power. While it is often believed that gender theories focus simply on relations between men and women, gender theories have also developed tools and concepts for examining hidden and marginalised forms of power.7 They investigate how
particular individuals and groups, even within subordinate collectives, are marginalised and disempowered by, and in relation to, others. They also show how different social, cultural, political and ideological levels all come into play when understanding power relations.

This interdisciplinary insight into power at the micro-level, and into the diverse ways in which power is reproduced, is enormously important in shaping human security approaches that fully confront people’s everyday experiences of oppression and fear. Here it is important to stress again that security studies emerges from a political science discipline that neglects the cultural, the ideological, and the everyday in favour of the macro-level and politics in the grand sense. An interdisciplinary emphasis is crucial to correcting this.

Another important way in which gender theorising energises security studies results from its emphasis on intersecting identities. Gender research, especially in the past decade or so, has stressed that gender identities are always related to others, and has been at the forefront of the analysis of myriad levels and forms of domination and injustice. Gender theorists working on development, like Maxine Molyneux, have initiated nuanced understandings of how gendered individuals have strategic needs and immediate wants, and raise provocative ideas about how these relate to short-term and long-term security.8

Within southern Africa, gender researchers (including Elaine Salo, Pat McFadden, Marjorie Mblinyi, Ruth Meena and Rudo Gaidzwanwa)9 have developed pioneering studies of, for example, masculinity and militarism; sexual rights and HIV/AIDS; development; and how Southern African states have circumscribed human rights. All of these writers examine gender in relation to a host of other factors, including colonial histories and neo-liberal globalisation; legacies of militarism in the region; structural adjustment; and post-colonial state consolidation. They therefore echo the view of many third-world gender scholars who insist that gender cannot be examined in isolation, that it is always enmeshed in layers and histories of power and injustice.

Although Southern African gender scholars provide important interventions in mainstream thinking about the key subjects of human security – the state, poverty alleviation, human rights – their work has generally not been integrated into core thinking about human security. In fact, Southern Africa since the mid-1990s has developed an especially rich tradition of gender scholarship, especially from Zimbabwe, South Africa and Tanzania. But
this work tends to be debated, disseminated and published in spaces that are peripheral to the Southern African social science and human security studies mainstream.

This work offers context-specific, well-grounded, multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary analysis that seems essential to human security studies today. Overall, the idea of ‘intersectionality’ – intersecting experiences, circumstances and identities in gender research – offers an important entry point for taking up the challenge of dealing with the vast array of political, economic, social, ecological and other factors that affect human security.

The impact of such context-specific analysis is well demonstrated in work on HIV/AIDS. It has been shown that women are less able to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS, or from the sexual violence that may expose them to the virus. Economic dependence worsens their vulnerability to infection from partners to whom they are financially bound. Moreover, women usually have inferior access to health care and treatment for themselves, but bear the burden of caring for the community. Social constraints may prevent them from speaking out while simultaneously condoning male sexual norms that place women at risk. These are all crucial factors that foster the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and men, and allow it to reach epidemic proportions, resulting in the rapid erosion of communities and societies. What is noteworthy about these sorts of investigations is the effort to grapple simultaneously with a range of complex issues – the attention to class, gender and culture all massively expands a narrowly sectoral approach to HIV/AIDS.

Some have argued that human security studies have become too diffuse and broad. Others feel that this breadth is precisely what energises conceptual and political debate. Gendered theory and analysis, with its careful attention to power, its efforts to deconstruct wide-ranging forms and levels of power and domination, is vitally important to increasing the breadth of human security approaches.

**Engendering ‘peace’**

It has been said that definitions of peace are often gender-blind and ignore the everyday gender violence that affects vast sections of the world’s population. Within the framework of conventional definitions of peace, however, it has been acknowledged that women, because of their socially determined roles, can play distinctive parts in peace-building and peacekeeping. Because women often manage the household and are directly responsible for the
survival of their families, they often suffer most during violent conflicts and wars. They also often carry the burden of supplying the demanding care-giving and household/community management needed during times of conflict.

It has also been argued that working-class, rural and peasant women are usually directly involved in peace-building, although the responsibility for formal peacekeeping in Africa remain vested in men and socially privileged groups. The belief that women’s social roles encourage their uniquely humane perspective is also at the heart of arguments that emphasise women’s superior abilities as resource managers and conservationists.

The view that women’s experiences and perspectives form some kind of corrective to masculine militarism has been important to arguments in favour of making women central to peace-building. Since the early 1990s, this view has resulted in numerous women-centred peace networks and initiatives in Africa. What remains a challenge, however, is for these to be fully connected to the dominant top-down, state and multilateral government-led peace-building initiatives. Some examples are:

- **Femmes Africa Solidarite** (FAS), formed in 1996 as a women’s peace organisation which focuses specifically on women’s leadership in the prevention and management of conflict;

- The Federation of African Women’s Peace Networks, formed at a Pan-African Conference on Peace, Gender and Development in Rwanda in 1997;

- The Association of Mozambican Women for Peace (MWFP), which played a crucial role in ensuring peaceful elections in Mozambique in 1994; and


The view that women have a central role to play in peace-building has been adopted even by the United Nations, which accepted (in terms of a Security Council Resolution in 2000) that gender should be mainstreamed in peacekeeping. But it is important to guard against essentialism, and to acknowledge that women have and continue to play leading, aggressive, militaristic and combative roles in conflict and war. Current feminist approaches to peace-building, therefore, avoid equating certain behaviour with biological women or men, and stress instead how gendered behaviour and values come into play in situations of war and peace.
Masculine behaviour and values revolve around hierarchy, competitiveness, aggression and physical violence. And, because these are dominant in society, many women imbibe them, and they become the ‘normative’ codes in society. ‘Feminine’ behaviour and values, linked to compassion, decentralisation, collaboration and nurturing, have been overdetermined by masculine ones. Gender theories interrogate the hierarchy of feminine and masculine, and envisage social values, behaviour and organisation that are more truly human. Advocating principles for social organisation and change that have been culturally coded as feminine is central to this.

This view of feminine and masculine behaviour touches on another, more revolutionary meaning of mainstreaming gender in peace-building. While organisations such as the UN have tended to interpret this simply to mean including women, feminists have argued that gender mainstreaming in peace-building entails comprehensive efforts to create institutional and organisational cultures and arrangements for change (as well as goals for change) that do not centralise or naturalise masculine hierarchy, competitiveness and aggression.

Conclusion

This new interpretation relates to more general ambiguities about the definition of gender mainstreaming. From an accommodative point of view, mainstreaming is believed to involve incorporating women, or creating ‘a balance’, a situation which means that while women may become more active, the overall systems in which they act remain the same. A radical approach to gender mainstreaming assumes that the key principles underpinning the status quo need to be destabilised and challenged, and that historically marginalised principles need to become more central. It is this fundamental effort to re-envisage strategies for change and agendas for change that poses the most radical challenge to how we define and envisage human security.

Notes


These tools and concepts are numerous. Apart from distinctive concepts such as patriarchy, gender theories have taken on certain terms, such as hegemony or reproduction, and unravelled hitherto hidden forms of power, especially by focusing on the micro level. Other interventions include such patterns as considering the links between the personal and the political, unpacking ‘human identity’, and encouraging self-reflexivity about the politics of knowledge.