SECURITISATION THROUGH THE LENS OF POSTSTRUCTURALIST FEMINISM: A CASE STUDY OF THE BALI PROCESS INITIATIVE

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Abstract

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the concept of security rapidly changes. Not only military, a range of new issues emerge and are presented as security threats, including migration. While the securitisation approach is widely adopted by states to deal with migration issues, this study finds that the approach does not effectively address the issue and even expose migrants to harmful situation. This study uses a discourse analysis method to examine how migration is securitised in the *Bali Declaration on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime* (The Bali Process)—a regional framework that was developed to address migration-related problems in the Asia Pacific. By employing a post-structuralist feminist lens, this study suggests that the Bali Process is a state-centric framework that contains highly gendered and 'racialised' discourses that marginalise and discriminate various categories of migrants concerned. This finding further implies the importance of deconstructing the apparently neutral character of securitisation. Security, as revealed in the study, remains under the authority of states and the priority of securing (state) borders—over human—remains evident.

Keywords: Securitisation, Migration, Poststructuralist Feminism, Bali Process.

1. Introduction

Following the aftermath of the World Wars, there has been a change in how we understand the concept of security in International Relations (IR). In the post-Cold War era, in particular, we witness a number of non-traditional security threats, such as social and environmental threats. One of the remarkable approaches to comprehend security issues is the securitisation theory, developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap De Wilde (1998), which has been extensively used by Security Studies scholars in IR. The theory provides an analytical framework to analyse how states securitise certain issues. Throughout this essay, I argue that the securitisation theory is challenged by the poststructuralist feminism due to its state-centric nature and normative dilemma of its political implications. By adopting two main approaches of deconstructing the state's dominancy and denaturalising the securitisation logic, the poststructuralist feminism offers an alternative view of understanding the securitisation. I will proceed by briefly explaining the traditional conception of securitisation and existing critiques from critical theorists in IR. Then, I explore how key points from these critiques are used by poststructuralist feminism to build a gender-focused analytical tool in understanding securitisation. I use the securitisation of human trafficking in the Asia Pacific region, through the Bali Process regime, as an example to support my argument.

2. Traditional Vis-a-Vis Critical Understanding of Securitisation

Securitisation is a prominent political theory in IR scholarship. Although it has been a subject to debate, the theory—which is developed by the Copenhagen school—has been extensively discussed by scholars, ranging from traditional security studies to critical theory proponents to explain and criticise a number of securitisation strategies adopted by international actors. In general, securitisation is a more extreme version of politicisation of issues. If there is a certain issue that is seen and discursively presented as an existential threat towards a certain referent object, securitising actors can employ a political strategy which is beyond the 'normal' or usual political procedures. This strategy can be justified by obtaining a certain degree of support from a significant audience (Buzanet al, 1998, pp. 23-6).

 A number of scholars apply this securitisation theory to make sense of and problematise various securitisation practices across the countries. Ibrahim (2005), for instance, explores how migration (existential threat) is securitised by Canadian government (securitising actor) to protect Canadian people (referent object) through discursive practices in Canada's immigration legislation. Another example is the research undertaken by Emmers (2003) which investigates the securitisation of transnational crimes in the Southeast Asian countries which is also related to the human migration issue. Watson (2011) also discusses how the humanitarianism agenda is perceived as a process of securitisation during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami to authorise a number of humanitarian immediate measures.

Despite the enormous number of applications of securitisation, critiques towards the theory exist, mostly within the critical security studies. According to Buzan and Hansen (2009, p. 215), critical theorists mainly problematise the state- and elite-centric and politically passive characters of the securitisation theory. Knudsen (2001, p. 362) supports this argument by highlighting the tendency of the theory to acknowledge the state as the main referent object of security. Peoples and Vaughan-Williams (2010, p. 86) also contends that the securitisation theory development legitimises what naturally counts as a security threat and that it resists to deepen the security to the individual level. Another critique comes from Aradau (2004, p. 398) who disputes the claim of 'analytical' feature of the securitisation theory and emphasises the negative political implication of the theory application.

This nuanced understanding of securitisation might be useful to examine a political action. However, this understanding seems to inadequately portray the gender relations that potentially have implications on securitisation. The erasure of gender analysis in securitisation is similar to the gender-neutral production of foreign policy which can hinder the complex and comprehensive picture of women's subordination (Archilleos-Sarll 2018, 36). Hence, the following section will discuss the key critiques of post-structuralist feminism in IR and how the intersection between feminism and critical theories offers a more advanced approach to securitisation.

3. Poststructuralist Feminism and Revisited Notions of Securitisation

Feminism is a notable approach along with other variants of critical theories within the IR scholarship. Feminist scholars, have criticised the study of International Relations which they regard 'malestream' (Youngs 2004; Runyan & Peterson, 2014). According to Whitworth (1994), studying gender within the realm of International Relations means examining the complex relations, not only between women and men but also between masculinity and femininity and their interplay within the society. Despite the diverse strands of feminism, Hansen (2014, p. 15) notes that prominent feminist theories agree on the importance of deconstructing the nature of the state, where the division of public and private spheres—links to the division of masculinity and femininity—can be observed. Through this process, we can understand not only that women

and femininity are systematically marginalised and devalued but also how these marginalization and devaluation are accepted as 'natural' in global politics.

The poststructuralist feminism, like other poststructuralist approaches in various disciplines, are interested in studying texts and discourses. They utilise these techniques of textual analysis to uncover the gendered nature of IR. According to Walker (1992), discursive structures as systems of differences provide a comprehension about what 'masculinity' means through its relation to 'femininity'. In this regard, poststructuralist feminism asserts that there is no extra-discursive 'biological gender' which is separated from the social construction of femininity and masculinity (Hansen 2014, p. 21). However, as Stern (2016, p. 36) argues, the analysis also engages with the social and political contexts in which the discourses are produced. Poststructuralist feminism in IR, therefore, investigates how the world is represented and uncover how certain objects are silenced, besides questioning the gender neutrality in those representations (Stern, 2016).

In regard to securitisation, I focused on two main approaches of poststructuralist feminism that draw on the critical theorists' arguments in the previous section. The first approach is to challenge the state-centric understanding of securitisation which appears to undermine other—including women—referent objects. Stern (2016) notes that poststructuralist feminism takes into account the marginalised/feminised referent objects, particularly women. She also reveals that women's security is usually privatised, marginalised or silenced, and that it is treated differently from that of men's. Thus, an application of the securitisation theory should attempt to deconstruct the 'masculine' character of the state as the key securitising actor, its legitimate power to monopoly the securitisation process and how they both marginalised/feminise other security objects. The second approach is related to the political implication of the securitisation theory. As Charrett (2007) affirms, securitisation exhibits a normative dilemma since it replicates dominant subjectivities in which security is accepted as a truth and a neutral concept—reinforcing the realist logic of security. It will then legitimise a 'negative' application of securitisation. Henceforth, poststructuralist feminism questions this 'neutrality'.

To further understand how poststructuralist feminism challenge and offer an alternative application of securitisation, I briefly discussed the securitisation of human trafficking in the Asia Pacific region through the discursive power of the *Bali Declaration on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime* (known as the Bali Process). There are two main themes within this Bali Process's main document that can be examined through both poststructuralist feminism's approaches as outlined above. First, the Bali Process extensively uses the discourse of human trafficking as a problem of 'illegal' migration. The illegality which is stressed by the Bali Process is a masculine and powerful idea to present the human trafficking as an existential threat for 'local people' in the Asia Pacific region. Second, there is a strategy of 'restructuring the countries of migration' in which the 'responsibility-transfer' discourse is recurringly reinforced. This strategy is used to assert that the 'illegal migration', as the key cause of human trafficking, should be addressed by the migrants' countries of origin.

3.1 The Notion of 'Illegal' Migration: Protecting the Citizens or the Borders?

> 'Ministers acknowledged the human rights dimensions of the problems of people smuggling and trafficking in persons, particularly women and children, and underlined that illegal movements were growing in scale and complexity worldwide, including in the Asia Pacific Region.' (The Bali Process 2002, p. 1)

The Bali Process's document begins with emphasising the dangers the trafficking poses to the vulnerable group of people, namely women and children, and linking the criminal practices to the 'illegal' migration. At a glance, one can sympathise with this narration as it portrays human as the referent object. However, the document afterwards indicates the fear towards the

violation of sovereignty and border security by the 'illegal' migrants. Hence, this fear legitimises the states as the securitising actors to impose a sovereignty-focused protection measures.

> 'Ministers shared the view that these flows were creating significant political, economic, social and security challenges, and that journeys were undertaken without respect for either national sovereignty or borders.' (The Bali Process 2002, p. 1)

> 'Ministers agreed that cooperation should be based on an acknowledgment that each State had a sovereign right and legitimate interest to develop and implement its own laws to address people smuggling and trafficking in persons…' (The Bali Process 2002, p. 3)

The above sentences suggest not only that the state's security narration is more dominant than the human rights aspect—as the document contains more referrals to border security—but also that the marginalised/feminised narrations of women's and children' security as referent objects are employed to mobilise supports from wider audience/people. Furthermore, these narrations also underpin the state-centric interests and strategy to counter human trafficking as a problem of 'illegal' migration. The states' monopoly of power in security sector seems to ease this securitisation process.

Drawing on the first approach of poststructuralist feminism, the framing of human trafficking issue as an 'illegal' migration problem and the 'legitimate' position of states to address the problem lead to two gendered implications. First, they obscure the link between border security and protection of women and children as the victims. As Aradau (2008, p. 22) states, almost all discourses on trafficking worldwide include the element of 'moving across borders'. Therefore, counter-trafficking measures are implemented to reduce 'illegal' migration. It implies that intra-borders trafficking which also encompasses a range of exploitative practices tend to not be securitised. Lobasz's (2009) research supports this argument in which she finds that focus on state's security leaves the importance of victim protection aside. Second, they enhance the masculine logic of states as the protectors. The feminised portrayal of women and children as passive and helpless victims (Hyndman & Giles 2011, 374) of 'illegal' migration bolsters states' duty to provide protection. Therefore, it legitimises the support and resources that should be obtained by states in order to provide that protection.

Moving on to the second approach, this feminist strategy to deconstruct the seemingly neutral character of securitisation can reduce the risk of legitimising negative securitisation. As mentioned above, the state-centric feature of counter-trafficking measures in the Bali Process might disregard the other silenced security objects. However, with the traditional understanding of securitisation, the rationalist/realist logic of 'securitising actors are authorised to securitise a certain existential threat to the referent object' are deemed neutral. Henceforth, this process is seen as 'politics as usual' in which the problematisation of the state's security conception and action are not necessary. Employing poststructuralist feminism lens, in contrast, means revealing what really matters beyond that 'neutral' securitisation. In case of the Bali Process above, for example, one can question why 'illegal' migration is perceived as a threat and what the implications are. Therefore, a deeper analysis of what states' political actions signify can be developed.

3.2 Statist and 'Racialised' 'Responsibility-Transfer' Discourse: Structuring the Countries of Migration

Another dangerous discourse—still linked to the 'illegal' migration discourse—within the Bali Process is the 'responsibility-transfer' narration. The below citation from the Bali Process's declaration asserts the distinction between the countries of origin, transit and destination—related to migration:

> 'Ministers noted that all countries, - including origin, transit and potential destination, should play a part in finding solutions for refugees…' (The Bali Process 2002, p. 4)

While this distinction is useful to provide real explanation about each category's relation and responsibility towards migration, in particular on refugee issues, it also indicates the reluctance of the Bali Process's member countries—which are mostly transit developing countries—to perceive the 'illegal' migration as their problem. Rather, the declaration clearly states that the unwanted migration channels should be prevented by the source countries. Other than these countries, their 'desired' obligation is to 'assist'.

> 'Ministers urged the international community to assist source countries to address the root causes of the illegal movement…to address the plight of refugees.' (The Bali Process 2002, p. 3)

> '…assistance to countries with large refugee populations. Ministers emphasised that consideration should also be given to encouraging more opportunities for legal channels of migration including access to the international labour market.' (The Bali Process 2002, p. 4)

Having these narrations critically examined, I argue that the 'responsibility-transfer' discourse denotes not only the feminisation of source countries as the producer of 'illegal' migrants, but also the racialisation of those countries as inferior than the other categories of countries, by which the 'legal' migration channels are provided. I will further explain this argument by employing both poststructuralist feminism's approaches to securitisation.

I utilise the first approach in deconstructing the state's dominancy in a way that focuses on the problematic state-centric logic itself. The feminisation and the 'racialisation' of the 'responsibility-transfer' discourse is statist as it implies the strategic role of the states to address and provide durable solutions to the issue of 'illegal' migration. However, as has been mentioned earlier, this logic appears to imply the reluctance of the Bali Process's member countries to deal with the issue and relegate it to the source countries, instead—claiming that the 'illegal' migration is not their fault. The dangers of this reasoning are, first, it might legitimise the states' restrictive asylum policy. As Missbach and Sinanu (2011) find, the Indonesia-Australia cooperation in combating people smuggling in the Asia Pacific region reflects the 'real' and discursive position of Indonesia as a transit country for 'illegal' migrants. Indonesia, in this case, maintains its stance that perceives the issue of 'illegal' migration as an Australian problem and therefore, a 'benign neglect' approach is adopted (Missbach & Sinanu 2011, pp. 65-6). This view then leads to the avoidance of taking responsibility of receiving asylum seekers and refugees to the country.

The second danger is regarding the 'racialised' characteristic of the 'responsibility-transfer' discourse. To further comprehend this 'racialisation', I adopt Stern's analysis (2011) on the gendered and 'racialised' European security strategy (ESS). In her research, she finds that in the text of the ESS, the Europe serves as the masculine actor that divides the world in hierarchical order and perceives the 'Other'/the rest of the world as inferior. There are two gendered binary pairs—in which the masculinity-femininity differences are embedded—of this 'The West and the Rest' narration that are related to the Bali Process's case: 1) order-chaos; 2) reason-emotion.

The order-chaos distinction in the ESS signifies the success of the Europe in maintaining its own security in orderly manner while 'the Rest', notably the Middle East, is characterised as experiencing chaotic situations; thus, the narration legitimises the Europe's 'assistance' for those countries in resettling conflicts (Stern 2011, p. 37). In a similar vein, the distinctive categories of countries of migration in the Bali Process reinforces a perception that the 'illegal' migrants-producing countries are in chaos and conflicts; hence, they are inferior compared to the transit and destination countries which are 'peaceful'. This inferiority marks the feminised and subordinated source countries. Moreover, due to the chaotic conditions, these source countries should be 'assisted' in order to create safe, 'legal' channels of migration, as have already been created by the Bali Process's member countries in their own regions.

Regarding the reason-emotion distinction, the ESS puts forward a focus on the economic and political development as a key factor to achieve the modern and developed Europe (Stern 2011, 46). This idea further suggests that the governance model that value material and rational (masculine) opportunities offered by the globalisation are more likely to advance the development goals. In contrast, if one is too focused on the emotional (feminine) factors—responding the globalisation with fears and scepticism, one might miss the benefits of it. Comparably, the Bali Process also promotes a 'rational' way to respond the 'illegal' migration issue by involving markets and business actors. It is evident in the declaration that 'access to the international labour market' is believed to be a solution to 'illegal' migration problem. 'Outside' the text, the importance of the economic sector is reflected by the Bali Process government and business forum in which the stakeholders commit to consider economic means to combat human trafficking practices (Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2017; Sheany 2017). On the contrary, the emotional ways, although acknowledged, rendered less important. The principle of human rights, for instance, is recognised as an important element and that it should be upheld in the counter-trafficking measures. However, there is no specific commitment outlined in the declaration on how to ensure the human rights protection. Moreover, due to its state-centric nature, the Bali Process excludes the involvement of humanitarian non-governmental organisations within the anti-trafficking regime (Kneebone 2014, p. 17).

The implications of the above analyses on the negative securitisation are similar to the first theme's discussion. The whole deconstruction of the state-centric feature of the Bali Process allows us to denaturalise the 'transit countries' stance. Feminist view suggests that this category of country is not naturally given, but is rather maintained through a discursive power by relevant actors. It is similar to the constructed view that the masculine ideas of 'order' and 'reason' are more valued and preferred than the feminine accounts of 'chaos' and 'emotion'. By revealing this powerful gendering and 'race-ing' logic, one will no longer take the hierarchical world order and women's (and femininity's) subordination for granted. Henceforth, the negative securitisation can be continuously problematised.

Conclusion

Securitisation has evoked endless debate among the rationalists, realists, positivists and post-positivists in IR discipline. The critiques are mainly about its state-centric character and normative dilemma of legitimising the negative securitisation. In this essay, both points are further discussed through the post-structuralist feminist lenses in IR. By adopting the poststructuralist feminist perspective, this essay argues that the securitisation theory is challenged. This perspective, which focuses on the gender relations through the discourses, enables us to rethink beyond the apparently neutral character of securitisation and its elements. Specifically, two main approaches of deconstructing the statist nature of securitisation logic and denaturalising the political implications of that logic serve as the important toolkit to question the traditional understanding of securitisation, as offered by the Copenhagen School. To support

this argument, I briefly illustrate the gendered and 'racialised' discourses on the securitisation of human trafficking within the Bali Process.

To conclude, I think it is important to pay attention to the problematic key concepts within the IR discipline. Not only on the securitisation, the feminist theorists, in general, have discussed the gendered character of IR concepts which induces the negative consequences on the future of human race, more importantly the marginalised and subordinated ones. In regard to the securitisation, more conversation between the traditional/conventional understanding and feminism itself should be more encouraged, not only to achieve more advanced theorisations to better understand the current political practices, but also to influence the policy-makers to implement the positive securitisation.

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