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(In)security: Gendered and Bordered

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Introduction

While misconceptions of feminist analysis simplify feminist international relations (IR) down to the study of women, feminist security analysis does more than merely accounting for the experiences of women. Rather, a gendered security analysis considers the dynamic process of how performances of violence and gender are discursively constitutive of each other. Through this lens, gender is not natural or essential. Instead, gender emerges as a relational position emerging from powered and political relations that control and mark bodies. In feminist analysis, violence does not merely happen against women because they are vulnerable. Violence against women is both gendered and gendering: violence occurs at the site of gender and the enactment of violence authors genders (Shepherd). Violence becomes a tool the state uses to secure its own power by placing others into positions of relative insecurity. And security—as a national force— is shaky, unstable, and in need of constant maintenance. To best understand the processes of nation-making, we must start by looking at the places where the nation is most malleable. At the border, the state displaces its own insecurity through patriarchal and masculinist shows of force which rely on violence to protect its hegemonic ordering. Through a gendered analysis of interviews within community members who live at the US-Mexico border in El Paso, Texas, this project seeks to uncover the ways the state relies on gendered abuses of power as a tactic of bordering.

A gendered analysis of security and insecurity at the border does more than just consider the ways in which women experience insecurity at the border. Though this analysis primarily focuses on the experiences of migrant women, its agenda goes beyond considering how women experience migration and investigates how (in)security and gender are co-constituted by the act

of bordering. It finds that at each stage of the migration process, state violence—physical, institutional, legal, and tacit—produces (in)securities through the same relationships that mark and gender bodies. However, just as hegemonically ordered relationships become the site where the state breeds insecurity by gendering women as vulnerable subjects, relationships which build a collective sense of power reconstruct disempowering constructions of gender by restoring agency to women.

Feminist Security Analyses

Though the fruits of feminist IR are as diverse as the activists and academics who make up the field, this project primarily draws from two insights of feminist security analysis. First, feminist IR challenge masculinist notions of the stare as a unitary and homogenous actor by expanding its location of security beyond official state interactions. And, second, feminist security analysis expands the scope of who counts as agents of security by taking the experiences of ordinary individuals seriously.

While mainstream security analysis and political theorists often view the state as the primary actor within international relations, feminist security analysis begins its work of disruption by unsettling the cohesion of the state as a static or cohesive category. A feminist understanding of IR and the state allows scholars to reverse the exclusion of women from political, economic, and military state power commonplace to much of IR theory. In Johanna Kantola's "The Gendered Reproduction of the State," rather than limiting her focus to sexism, or even how patriarchy creates a sexist structure of power, Kantola argues that gender is simultaneously constructed by the state to maintain power, and the state is constituted by its maintenance and reproduction of gender as relational power roles (2007). Kantola deconstructs

the inside and outside dichotomy which separates actions the state takes within its borders and actions states take interacting with other nations. Kantola argues that political scientist false construct this distinction based on their understandings of IR as entirely and outwardly relational which allows the state to reify its power and identity within masculinist spheres. This distinction between foreign and domestic policy is dangerous because ignores the way private and public spheres act on eachother. Feminist security analysis responds to insights like Kantola's by complicating state boundaries through its consideration of how individuals and organizations within, outside, and beyond the state interact within the proccesses of nation making. By recognizing the complex and often contradicting interests of people who live within a state, feminist security analysis accesses a nuance that poltical realism loses through its personification and rationalization of the state as man.

In order to expand its security analysis beyond relations among official state actors, feminist IR starts its understanding of security by looking to the experiences of individuals often displaced and ignored by discourses concerned only with institutional authorities and relationships. While mainstream international relations conform to a false binary that distinguishes between political and private actors, feminist IR argues that the gendered dynamics socialized within interpersonal and family relationships are reproduced to uphold and dileniate national and international relations among individuals and states. Cynthia Enloe, a germinal scholar in feminist IR, argues that the international is personal in the sense "that governments depend upon certain kinds of allegedly private relationships in order to conduct their private affairs" (Enloe 196; 1990). Though women—and especially mothers—are often excluded from traditionally powerful political positions and depoliticized as a result of that exclusion, Enloe argues that the domestic and private labor of women is necessary for the stability of state and

military institutions. Instead of reducing women to their frequent marginalization from the state, feminist IR starts by looking at how individuals seemingly outside of state power interact with and are shaped by the forces of the nation and the state in order to better understand the complex web of actors and relationships central to the maintenance of national boundaries.

Methodology

Just as the analytical premise of this project is informed by the insights of feminist IR security theory, feminist IR methodologies inform my approach. This analysis considers segments from nine interviews I conducted with my peers as part of a team of undergraduate students working on the Moral Courage Project, a multimedia human rights based storytelling endeavor. The analysis focuses on deeply individual and personal experiences because "Feminist theory and practice has emerged from a deep skepticism about knowledge that claims to be universal and objective" (Tickner and True 228). Tickner and True argue that, from a feminist perspective, the very function of research should be to acquire "knowledge for the purpose of social change, which involves uncovering practical knowledge from people's everyday lives to liberate them from oppressive structures" (230). Because feminist security analysis recognizes that state actors rely on violence and force to elicit a sense of personal insecurity among vulnerable populations in order to protect their own positions, this analysis considers emotional experiences as a legitamate source of knowledgeway necessary in understanding state and interstate functioning.

Gendering the Causes of Migration

Though not all women migrate for the same reasons, various case studies around asylum and our fieldwork in El Paso highlight two gendered push factors. Many women seeking asylum migrated in order to flee sexual violence, while other women viewed their own migration as a performance of motherhood. The experiences of women who flee sexual violence and women who migrate to provide for their family may be different, but in both cases, these push factors create conditions where state power interacts with migrant relationships to gender immigrant women as apolitical and vulnerable subjects.

Feminist perspectives of security consider how sexual violence functions to produce and reproduce gender and power. Shepherd argues that "Violence establishes social relationships… it marks and makes bodies … it constitutes subjects even as it makes them incomplete" (2). Though this discursive construction of sexual violence ties the power exerted and created through gender-based sexual violence to the power exerted and created in the ordering of the state, asylum laws fail to consider sexual violence as a political act. Despite a "gradual and incremental movement by immigration advocates and government officials and judges to accept the intersectionality of gender and sexuality as a basis for women to flee their countries of origin" (Berger 681), rulings often remain arbitrary. Unless there is legal proof that perpetrators commit sexual violence against a woman because of her status as a woman, women fleeing sexual violence are not considered to be members of a targeted social class and do not qualify as right-holders of asylum (Reiman).

The depoliticizing of sexual violence in asylum law genders women as passive by denying women power as right bearers and thus asserts the state as the exclusive site of power. Berger argues that asylum is granted insofar as doing so produces the same gendered and racialized relations that produce the hegemonic nation-state. A case study of women seeking

asylum in Sweden found that women were not awarded asylum based on their status as refugees of sexual and political violence, but were granted provisional stays because of their status as mothers (Sager). When state asylum laws depoliticize sexual violence, refuse entry on a rights basis, and instead welcome homogenized women and children on a humanitarian basis, the state maintains its paternalistic ordering. The refusal to acknowledge sexual violence as a tool of ordering power instead of a natural result of powerlessness refies the hegemonic power the state depends on. For this reason, asylum laws favor violence that is traditionally understood as public and against political actors and do not consider how the routing of power and the construction of gender (and state hegemony) through sexual violence is a political act.

Just like the preferencing of women as mothers in asylum laws accepts women into the state so long as they are gendered as vulnerable, the demands of caretaking within inhospitable states genders women as vulnerable by reducing them to their status as mothers and limiting them to traditionally private spheres. Martina Lopez, an undocumented woman we met in a sacristy, said she migrated to America so her children could get an education and stays for them even though she is lonely and her migration has dissolved her marriage (Gx and Bx). Gabriela Castaneda, an undocumented mother of three children, lives in America so her son can recieve treatment for a congenital heart condition. Though she wanted to move back to Juarez with her husband after he was deported, she explained that, "The reason I didn't go back to live with him is because of the education, safety, and medical attention that I need to provide for my children. My son would very likely die if I went back with my husband and didn't stay in the U.S." (Dx and Cx). For Gabriela, her relationship to her children and husband structure her identity and interaction with the migration system. She describes her life by saying, "I have been a single mother my whole life and not by choice" (Dx and Cx).

Though the home is often framed as the apolitical epitome of the private sphere, state power genders women as mothers both within and inside of family relationships and makes the home and the family a primary site of political force. A case study that examined the effect of mothering amid the threat of deportation found that:

> Women emphasized the importance of motherhood, yet structural constraints engendered by their immigration statuses limited their abilities to mother their children. Mothers also constantly feared that their deportations would leave their children without caregivers. This, in turn, led to what they described as psychological and emotional duress. (Lopez, Horner, et al.)

The construction of motherhood fosters insecurity by demanding mothers rise to an impossible standard of caretaking without the resources necessary to sustain it.

Because the Mexican state failed to provide the necessary care to their children (healthcare and education), both women—forced to act in the caretaking capacity of mothers—migrated. However, because the American state failed to provide the necessary path for entry, both mothers had to migrate without documentation. The heightened vulnerability of undocumentation for both women meant that they could not remain with their husbands, and both women chose their duty to provide care—within the context of their identity as mothers—over the companionship, comfort, and care they received through their identity as wives. In this way, both of the states' failure to provide security for the family as a unit forced each woman to occupy the role of mother at the expense of previously held identities as wife or citizen.

In instances of both sexual violence and motherhood as push factors for migration, state and hegemonic power interact with migrants by gendering bodies as vulnerable and routing that insecurity to enforce their own power. Women who flee sexual violence but are denied rights-based claims of asylum are depoliticized and accepted into the state—and thus reified within it—as vulnerable agents dependent on state kindness. Similarly, women who migrate to provide

necessary care for their children are forced to prioritize their role of nurturer over other roles and mandated to navigate the world within the context of vulnerable motherhood. These constructions of women—as vulnerable, apolitical, and mother—create relational scripts between the woman and the state which maintain the state's paternalistic ordering and monopoly on political power and agency.

Gendered Performances of Bordering

Bordering requires more than just drawing a line in the sand. At the border, securities and insecurities are constructed relationally: both in the ways migrants interact with institutions and the ways individual security actors position themselves against migrants. Wibben asserts that "Identity can be understood as the outcome of exclusionary practices in which resistant elements to a secure identity on the "inside" are linked through a discourse of "danger" with threats identified and located on the outside" (69). The state's ability to make immigrants, and all others who fall outside the bounds of the nation feel insecure, constructs the state's own sense of itself as secure. Bordering becomes the stage where the co-constitutive processes of producing gender, security, and the state are performed. Shepherd argues that "Surveillance as a security measure functions to breed insecurity" (Shepherd 75), and thus gender and (in)securities are reproduced within the complex web of relationships among the surveyor and surveyed.

This practice of bordering requires a variety of state and non-state actors to work together to construct an identifiable state alongside the production of (in)security. Borders are not enforced as much as bordering is performed: "Border governance crosses professions and sectors: police officers, judges, and bureaucrats are all involved in making decisions in ways that take into account the responses of other sectors" (Cote-Boucher, Infantino, and Salter 203). And,

since bordering is carried out by individuals tasked with enforcing the border, the (in)securities of the border are contracted relationally.

Bordering agents create (in)security by cultivating the feeling of deportability within migrants. Maja Sager defines deportability as "the possibility of deportation as a central organizing principle in the lives of migrants without legal status or residence permit" (31). Whether or not migrants are actually deported, Sager found that migrants who felt deportable experienced life through the context of this insecurity. Feelings of insecurity caused by deportability made it hard for migrants to form relationships or find work. Ursula Avila, an undocumented college-aged student in El Paso, described her own feeling of deportability as constant. She explained, "Even if you're in subway and a border patrol agent comes in to buy a sandwich. I know I'm just a person buying a sandwich and so are they, but my heart rate accelerates. Even now. It's crazy. The threat is everywhere" (Gx). Bordering agents, when clearly marked as enforcers of state power, function to reify the omnipresence of state power within these interactions by serving as omnipresent sites of surveillance. When the state's bordering agents are able to move migrants to constant insecurity, the state positions itself as an unwavering bastion of security.

Estefania, a cross-border student, told us how much of the anxiety she experienced occurred from her interactions with individual border patrol agents acting in the capacity of the state. She described an instance where a border patrol agent took away someone's visa after finding a Donald Trump meme on his phone. She explained that agents are empowered so "they can do whatever…they get mad at you, you could get punished so you just have to do what they say" (Kx and Mx). Within interactions between migrants and bordering agents, the agents asserts themselves against the migrant as the state and assumes power from that relational positioning.

In this context, the bordering agent acts as a state gatekeeper to migrant bodies. When migrants then interact with these individual agents as state gatekeepers, the state is no longer a nebulous idea but a physical body that can interact with their own body.

This relational bordering and (in)security is performed by actors beyond just border patrol. Immigration attorney Louis Lopez describes the processing of detained migrants as "conveyor belt justice" where bureaucrats with arbitrary administrative choices have authority over migrant bodies. Rather than law, Lopez argues that the immigration system is driven by human nature: "there is a human element you're not just changing tires or moving cogs. You are subject to individuals prejudices, their habits, their beliefs and so the guy who is working the desk and making the decisions as to whether you are going to go to camp or if you are going to be prosecuted has that discretion" (Hx, Jx, and Bx). In this interaction, the individual actor—as a unitary entity—reproduces state power within personal relationships. Additionally, Lopez says gender plays into the choice of who gets processed criminally and who gets processed civilly. According to him, men are far more likely to get processed criminally (Hx, Jx, and Bx). By responding to the gender of migrants with the decision of who is and is not a criminal, the bordering agent—acting as the state—genders bodies by marking them as criminal. And, once again, gender is constructed for women as a depoliticizing force. By charging women with civil offenses and charging men with criminal offenses, the bordering agent ignores the capacity of women to interact with the state in a transgressive capacity. This coddling ignores the potential of women to act and interact with the state in public and political spheres.

The relationships between bordering agents and migrants construct insecurity when agents assert their power over migrants rather than working to build power with migrant communities. The distance created by this assertion of us vs. them creates the distinction of a

powered state and a powerless other that is necessary for the bordering needed to assert the state as a unitary entity (Shepherd). Sandra Spector, an activist in El Paso, described the change in El Paso when border patrol shifted from an approach rooted in community relationships to one that served the ideal of national security over the interest of migrants. She explained that, originally, a knowledge of the community allowed enforcement to interact with migrants as individuals. However, the militarization of local police through their deputization as agents for national security demanded local police interact with migrants as agents of state power which erased the space for human relationships. Spector explained that, once, "the city knew our community was made up of mixed families. There was an agreement between the local police and the sheriff's department. They agreed that they would never ask for papers when they showed up for crimes. Ever since Trump came in, there's been rogue officers that pretend that they're border patrol" (Hx, Gx, and Bx). When bordering agents relate to migrants within the capacity of the state, rather than as individuals in a reciprocal relationship, masculinist state power drives these interactions to create a sense of insecurity that renders migrants as subjects of power rather than agents.

Reconstructing Securities

When bordering agents relationally assert themselves against migrants within the context of their state power, they create insecurity by depoliticizing migrants and underwriting their capacity as actors. However, just as these relationships exist to breed insecurity, relationships which assert migrants as actors and right-bearers function to create experiences of increased security. A case study that examined refugees who fled gender-based violence found that, for these women, "Social networks provide social and emotional support, self-esteem, trust, identity,

coping, shared purpose and perceptions of control, the absence of which is demonstrated to have negative impacts on health" (Keygnaert, Vetternburg, and Temmerman). While relationships where power is asserted over a migrant disempower migrants, collective relationships that build power together create a sense of emotional power and security that mitigates the insecurities of deportability developed throughout the processes of migration.

Hegemonic state constructions of gender which mark women as apolitical and vulnerable are reoriented and reconstructed when women organize together. A case study by Tellez examined the collective activism of women on the Mexican side of the border. She found that though women's activism originally responded to domestic and familial threats that drew from their construction as mothers, their activism evolved to interrupt the private political divide often enforced by the state to depoliticize women. Tellez argues that "Collective struggles on the border not only work to undo the dichotomous nature of women's public and private roles, but also make evident the border as a transformative space that becomes the site where women come together to re-imagine and redefine gendered, class-based, and racialized social structures" (549). By transforming the private and the home as the entry way for public political action, these women deconstruct asylum law's depoliticized mother by reconstructing women as agents and right-bearers. Tellez found that "A discord in traditional family life occurs when the women develop a political consciousness through their critical engagement with the state and transnational companies" (558). This argument suggests that when these women worked together to develop a consciousness that linked previously separated private and the political violence, they were able to see the ways the state depended on private violence and were more likely to leave situations of domestic violence.

In El Paso, collective organization that emphasizes migrant rights as human rights reconstruct relationships and the domestic sphere as a political site of agency. Founded by Fernando Garcia, the Border Network For Human Rights (BNHR), is a grassroots community organization that uses a "Mary Kay model" of human rights to educate migrant communities about their rights by sending community rights advocates into homes to host rights education sessions (Dx and Mx). This living room kind of action reverses the gendering of women as apolitical actors within private spheres by making the domestic a ground of agency. When migrants are educated and told by people whom they trust that they have rights, they are able to exist in relationships that construct them as political actors and, as a result, they experience feelings of increased security.

Nayeli Sanchez, an organizer for BNHR, experienced this transformation. Nayeli lived in America as an undocumented mother and was abused by her husband. Nayeli explained that, "he always had that over my head that he could call immigration and separate me from my kids or that he would drag me across the border and leave me." Like other undocumented women, Nayeli's gendered construction as an undocumented mother led to her feelings of insecurity because she was fully consumed by the task of caretaking in an environment that made caretaking nearly impossible. Nayeli explained, this struggle was exhausting, but her role of mother demanded her persistence: "you can't give up. Especially once you have children, you can't." When Rosa, another undocumented women working with the BNHR told Nayeli about a similar experience of abuse where she called the police, Nayeli said Rosa's shared experience empowered her: "It gave me the courage for when the cops were to show up" (Kx and Mx).

Nayeli's situation did not change, but the way she was made to feel about it did. And—as Shepherd argues—since security and insecurity are constructed by how the individual is made to

feel, emotions matter. Fear and the sense of deportability creates insecurity, but when Nayeli saw herself as a right-bearing individual, she realized "Yes, we are undocumented. But, that does not mean that we have to live in… not just fear of immigration but… Fear of the one that is supposed to love us," and she called the police on her husband. And Nayeli saw the same change among women who went through rights education. After training another undocumented woman about her rights, that woman had ICE show up at her house. But Nayeli said, "With all the training, she knew how to respond and knew how to ask to be shown the warrant and to not open the door unless that is done…So, the outcome of that was completely different than if she would not have known her rights" (Kx and Mx).

Even if human rights are not enforceable in this context, the ability they give a migrant to situate themselves against state actors undermines the gendered construction of the migrant woman as passive and unpolitical. When migrants have an awareness of their rights, they are able to assert themselves as political actors against bordering agents. And, when this assertion of rights happens, bordering actors can no longer assume the power of a totalizing state. Despite a lack of political power, undocumented immigrants are moved to resistance by the security they experience relationally. Nayelli says being part of a community made her realize that, "Maybe I can't leave the country, but I can mobilize within the country. That makes a big difference" (Kx and Mx).

The same collective organizing restores agency to undocumented migrant laborers in the workplace, a field where migrants, especially women, are vulnerable to exploitation. A 2018 case study found that migrant women excluded from the formal economy experienced increased vulnerability and risk of sexual and domestic violence (Gebreyesus et al.). Carlos Marentes, director of the Border Agricultural Workers Project, a support service for migrant laborers,

describes the labor conditions at the border as "semi-slavery" where laborers have no rights or ability to advocate for themselves or hold their employers accountable (Gx and Bx). Marentes explains that without documentation, migrants are erased as actors and humans and regarded solely as cheap labor. But Marentes says that, by building social networks within a shared space, the center is able to "organize immigrants so that they can protect themselves." Rather than constructing migrants as victims of exploitation, the capacity to organize gives migrant laborers "the role of subjects, of protagonists" where they are the "ones finding the solution to the problem instead of trying to have the church or the social institutions or nonprofits or the government take care of them" (Gx and Bx). Rather than being beholden to a paternalistic state for resources and protection, migrants are able to relationally construct security together. Marentes describes this unionizing as crucial to the restoration of migrant agency because "Real empowerment is when you don't depend on the system to protect from the system" (Gx and Bx).

Not only does the collective power of migrant laborers combat the construction of the migrant as a passive victim, but the collective space-—rooted in solidarity—combats disempowering gendered constructions as well. When Marentes began his work, he said that there was resentment and competition between the laborers from Mexico and the US and between men and women. However, Marentes explained that when "We started to have them understand that they are the same. They are part of a labor force that is used and exploited by capital, by corporations" the migrants began "to see themselves as a group, as brothers, as sisters" (Gx and Bx). Once this sense of solidarity was created, the center was able to combat the sexual abuse of women by their supervisors by cultivating "an awareness between the male workers that it is not acceptable to have somebody abusing a woman" by helping all of the

laborers to see "that the oppression of women is how the system oppresses everybody" (Gx and Bx).

Collectivizing the work force created solidarity that resisted racialized and gendered oppressions by the state. When identity is considered in isolation without an attention to intersectionality, men who are oppressed because of their race might deepen state power by contributing to the gender oppression that places the state in a position of supremacy. However, Marentes's work on building an intersectional collective created the solidarity needed for migrants to unite against their exploitation at all its points of operation. While gendered racism sends migrants to the margins of labor markers and intensifies the exploitability of women (Sager), building a sense of connectedness among migrants allowed them to see themselves as a group united against state power and allowed them to see the way the specific oppression of women contributed to the oppressions of migrants as a class. This work of solidarity deconstructs the gendered and raced subjectivities of both women and migrants as bodies to be acted on by creating a network of relationships where migrants act together.

Despite their very real, material, and dangerous consequences, genders, borders, and (in)security are all unstable forces that must be constantly constructed and reconstructed to maintain the oppressive power of the patriarchal state. Feminist bottom-up approaches to security and migration start by looking at the ways individuals feel about, interact with, and respond to these systems in order to understand the ways these forces are constructed. Though this understanding does not solve the problems, identifying the threads that hold together the myths of patriarchy give us a place to start our work of unraveling. When we work together across borders to pull apart the web of oppression, we discover a hopeful reality—the same

relationships that are distorted by supremacy to order the world along the lines of domination

and subjugation can be redeemed, reordered, and remade into wells of shared love and power.

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