Identity in Security Studies

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Abstract

Security as a central concept in International Relations discipline is strongly related with the existence and survival. That broader understanding becomes the initial point of discussions and inquires about what is to be secured and how it can be secured. In fundamental level, those questions moved the concept of security towards meta-theoretical discussions in International Relations. After those meta-theoretical discussions, a general acceptance has been reached on the reference object of security as the security of humans and states within Security Studies. In different terms, the emphases over those objects and their priority in the security studies have differed. In general, that change in the object of security studies has been parallel with developments and turning points in discussions over International Relations theory. In this study, the main aim is to discover the effect of constructivist turn in International Relations theory to the security studies through analyzing new concepts, variables and methods, such as identity and perception.

Keywords

International Relations Theories, Identity, Security Studies

1. Introduction

After the constructivist turn in International Relations theory which took place in 1980s, the identity and security became complementary factors (Jarvis & Holland, 2015: p. 51). Thus this work asks what is the role of identity in security studies and how does the constructivism affect the security studies.

The traditional security studies were referring to the Westphalian values and state-centrism (Jarvis & Holland, 2015: p. 9). Until the end of the cold war, the main object of security was generally considered as the survival of states. However, these traditional theories became challenged in post-cold war period and after the discussions on constructivism became popular in academics. In traditional era, International Relations

was characterized by state-based relations. For instance in realist theoretical tradition states are considered as primary actors and International Relations was seen as diplomatic and strategic relations between states. And in this state-centered understanding, the security is a central phenomenon in International Relations, thus the principal interest of actors is considered to provide their security. According to this view, interstate relations are shaped by this interest which takes security as ultimate goal.

However, what those actors understand from being secure was diverse and dependent on their capacity, power, political and social circumstances, culture, geopolitical position. Those differences influence the security and threat perceptions of actors and therefore security understanding even in state-centric approach has variation. And for clarifying those variations of security understandings and drawing the non-material factors' role in different actors' security, understanding new theoretical equipments was derived from new discussion in International Relations theory. Thus in order to implement that requirement, security studies started to observe the role of identity and identity formation of a state in constructivist understanding for further understanding states' perception of security and threat in non-material sense.

In general understanding, security is related with threat, in other words security is lack of threat. In different approaches of International Relations, there are two distinct prospects for how security can be provided (Williams, 2008: p. 6). The first point of view is expressed by realist tradition which says security can be provided by accumulation of power in material sense. In that situation, actors must have power-related factors such as arms, military and strong economy. The second, rival opinions came from Critical schools which indicate however, security is not a power-oriented phenomenon. This view attributes security with emancipation, justice and human rights (Jarvis & Holland, 2015: p. 18). In that consideration security is understood as the nature of relationship between different factors not limited with material and observables. Here, security is not produced by the ability to use of force on others. Instead, critical view asserts providing security is not by bearing others, but it requires cooperations. And Constructivist school of International Relations theory is on between that two rival views on security studies. The difference and uniqueness of constructivist school is explained by its emphases on states as primary actors of international relations and as primary objects of security. And in addition security with relatively state-centred view, attaches importance to non-material facts and variety of security such as identity, culture, shared beliefs and understanding threat perception based on that kind of unobservable critical concepts (Jarvis & Holland, 2015: p. 11). In brief, those different schools in security studies have in common starts their arguments with solving meta-theoretical problems in security studies such as objects and subject of the security by asking security for whom and what are the threats of that security.

After defining the subject of security, what is the threat to that subject, what creates the security problems can be defined clearly. As seen in the discussion hitherto, one significant step for understanding the concept of security in International Relations is to evaluate to whom security belongs and what is to be regarded as threat and its na-

ture. Principally, the reference-object of security must be analyzed clearly. In that initial analyzes, security studies have progressed through two different schools, and through critiquing the first state-centered traditional school, some scholars of critical security studies give priority to humans thus for those scholars, the reference object of security studies are individuals (Jarvis & Holland, 2015: p. 105). However, that critique and human-centered opening in security studies raises new questions and complexities. In this point the concept of identity came to theoretical agenda similarly with problems of state-centered tradition. As mentioned above, in state-centered approaches, each actor is regarded to have different view on security and perceptions of threat based on their identities. And also in humanitarian security studies, this problem remains unsolved. Which individuals are the objects of security and what do they demand as for producing their security?

2. The Concept of Identity in International Relations

Identity in broadest understanding indicates a perspective and category for understanding the humanity, individuals and society. The identity concept has come to theoretical agenda of International Relations and became an object of analysis especially after the cold war era through constructivist turn in International Relations theory. According to initial works on the concept the identity is a social phenomenon which refers to different topics, conceptions and expressions. Along with the centralization of its position as a basic concept on social sciences and the subsequent meanings generated thanks to the concept itself and discussions, it has acquired more common use areas, different senses and correspondences. According to the first-sense meaning and definition identity is the perception of subject related with who they are and what sort of subject they are, and how they relate to others (Abrams & Hogg, 1999: p. 2). And another common definition says the identity is a notion to describe the way individuals and groups recognize themselves and recognized by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language and culture (Deng, 1995: p. 1). As International Relations scholar, Alexander Wendt says on this issue that "Identities are relatively stable, role specific understandings and expectations about self" (Wendt, 1992: p. 397).

The phenomenon of identity in International Relations according to Fuat Keyman, is a central concept and composes cultural foundations as manner of explanations for understanding the international politics. And Identity in international relations theory is a functional concept for analyzing the Non-Western and different cultures and societies (Keyman, 2011: p. 218).

In this sense national identities as a political concept and the identity of states as a collective identity which is a subject of International Relations should be separated (Bilgin, 2007: p. 13). In order to obtain a definitive and certain specification of identity its elements should be clarified. The identity is a composition of subjective components like common language and religion, geographical location, and at the same time subjective components like collective memory, cultural practices, common myths and shared values. The distinguishing factors of definitions referring different nations are actually

the result of those distinctive elements but they can also put more differences to those components. State identity is generally seen as a part of culture, which most constructivists define as socially shared beliefs. This definition of culture is quite different from and narrower than the conventional or commonsense meanings of the word.

3. Identity Formation of States, Interaction and the Other

The meaning of identity in International Relations is based on the distinction of self and other as mentioned above. Thus the first step of constructivist security studies is to detect the connection between security and others as a formation process of identity.

Constructivism International Relations theory which is the most related school with the identity phenomenon has derived its theoretical tools for understanding the formation of identity from In western philosophy the origins of the opposition and dialectic between self and other can be taken back to Hegel. Social identities including racial, ethnic, gendered, sexual, religious and national bases are defined in relation to significant others just as they articulate ideas of self or selfhood which are communicated and given meaning through social interaction. Therefore creating an identity is always based on establishment of a hierarchy between violent clashes of the two poles. This indicates that the identity has always been constructed by the differences and establishes a social objectivity. According to Wendt in order to explain the foreign policy actions of a state the interests of that states should be clarified nevertheless for understanding the interests of a state, its identity has to be explained, identity and interest was placed in the interaction process thus identity and interest is being constructed in the process of interaction.

According to Wendt the identify is a result of that inter-subjective interactions which can indicate and determine the interests. After all, the identity of a state is a product of practices of identity formation in domestic level. The practices of identity formation are related to the process of nationalizing, both with the political foundation of the state and the appearance of the sense for national identity after the interaction. Collective memory has a significant role in this process because identities are being constructed with the symbols, myths, beliefs, customs and knowledge which composes the collective memory.

The effects of constructivist discussion of International Relations theory in security studies brought new approaches for understanding security. Accordingly the existence of another, perceptions and inter-subjective interactions as seen in the identity formation process have a critical role in consisting security and threats. In this meaning, studying and analyzing identity as a founding factor of security and threats have gained importance in security studies. Scholars of security studies seek to take the un-confidence and doubts about the "other" in the process of constructing threat. Therefore states and other objects of International Relations have shaped what they understand from security in this way according to constructivist security studies. States compose their identities in order to estimate expectations from each other, understand way of their behaviour. Namely identities strongly reflect interests, preferences and possible

actions of actors in international relations (McSweeny, 1999: p. 103).

4. Identity and Security

As seen in the analyses of identity formation process, the identity phenomenon indicates the perception of security and threats through personificating the self and other. The other composes the threat or possible cause of insecurity, and the self is the definite object of security. In security studies the new security problems and objects are strongly related with the identity and self/other distinction. After the traditional era of security understanding, in global scope new treats such as migration, drug dealing and terrorism are associated with the identities and interactions rather than material understanding of security.

Globalization as a current phenomenon especially after the end of cold war initiated a theoretical discussion in security studies over whether the security studies focus on traditional, state-centered analyses or to broaden the concept of security in humanitarian and universal understanding (Panić, 2009: p. 29). The current discussions in security studies are analyzing those problems and phenomenon for drawing how they became global issues and what is the role of identities and constitution of other in those crime and insecurity components. In this situation, the perception of other based on identities are seen as sources of insecurity and generates threats for whole humanity.

One of the first effects of identities of states in constructivist sense on the security studies are to subsequently strengthen the Westphalian values such as borders, territorial integrity of national identity and mental boundaries of societies (Özlük, 2009: p. 6). Composing a secure area has always been obligation for the existence of states, and in constructivist understanding identities and norms as determinants of national interests generate a common cultural area to be secured (Jarvis & Holland, 2015: p. 114). In this reality, the rise of identity as non-material concept of International Relations can be said to strengthen the state-centered tendency in security studies.

However along with its positivist and post-positivist content, constructivism makes it possible to resolve the security issues and threats through sharing norms, producing a common identity instead of using military force. This option is produced by the constructivist emphasize on societal nature of International Relations. And at that point, some controversial concepts in security studies such as collective security. The European Union is an outstanding example of constructivist form if identity creation and a common security understanding based on identity. A seek for common foreign policy in the process of constructing European identity shows the promises of constructivist security understanding.

According to constructivism, the concept of security is a social construct of collaboration or struggle area. As a method for understanding the security concept, constructivism offers social and historical contexts mostly based on their challenges to traditional/realist security understanding. Constructivist security studies have developed a variety of social, cultural and historical factors as causes of security problems, threats and conflicts. In subjective epistemological preference of constructivism, the concept of

threat is also a subjective fact which can be understood by focusing on identities. Constructivist understanding of threat is associated with self/other distinction, historical construction of norms, beliefs and nationalist discourses.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the relationship between security and identity is analyzed. The security studies are strongly affected by the current developments and discussions in International Relations theory. The end of cold war has initiated new theoretical discussions and inquiries in International Relations theory and traditional approaches such as realism, and their principal assumptions of state-centrism, objectivist and rationalist methodology and importance of material factors is started to be criticized. As a current school in that criticizing period constructivism emerged in late 1980s in International Relations theory.

Until the end of cold war, understanding of security and threats in both academics and states were based on material capabilities, and states were considered as the main reference object of security and threats was also perceived from other states in that era. However, after the end of cold war, these state-centered analyses started to lose their priority. In global scope, new threats and security problems have appeared, such as migration, smuggling and terrorism which are not produced by states. And in this term, the identities and norms in social manner gained importance in analyzing those kinds of new threats and the globalizing of security objects. The security became placed in between self and the other. Therefore the identity phenomenon became an important factor in defining security. The main reason behind that importance is the definition of security in terms of identity and the threat perceived from the other.

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