

## “Go North, Young Man”<sup>1</sup> – Gendered discourses on climate change and security in the Arctic

Auður H Ingólfssdóttir

Faculty of Social Science, University of Lapland & University of Iceland

**Abstract:** The Arctic is one of several hot spots in the world where impacts of climate change are expected to be especially acute. The melting of the ice cap has put the Arctic back on the map of geopolitics. But are the environmental changes related to climate change likely to threaten peace and stability in the region? Currently, there are two competing discourses dominating the discussion about climate change and security in the Arctic. One highlights the danger of competition and conflict; the other emphasizes the need for cooperation. This paper discusses the tension between those two discourses from a feminist perspective, using concepts related to gender, masculinity and femininity to explore the values underpinning the different approaches. Are feminine values still pushed to the margins in the field of geopolitics? Or have they entered the stage as an accepted player, capable of useful contribution to the shaping and implementation of policy?

### Arctic discourses

In the past, the Arctic has often been presented as a pristine territory, waiting to be discovered. Arctic explorers' travelogues created an image of a cold, dangerous, distant but mysterious region. Only the brave and heroic dared to travel to there. Whereas the image of the explorer is of the masculine hero, the Arctic as a region is feminized. The Arctic environment is pristine, untouched, and almost virgin like. It is to be conquered by the brave explorer.

Masculine values are also dominant in more recent times, when the Arctic became a playing field for superpowers to demonstrate their military power. Heininen (2010a) identifies three different stages of security in the Arctic in past decades. The first stage started during World War II

when the Arctic was militarized. During this period open battle took place, e.g. bombings of the harbor of Kirkenes in Norway, and the harbor and town of Murmansk in the Soviet Union. The struggle between states about sovereignty had reached these northern regions and military tension was high. The second stage of security covers most of the Cold War and Heininen names this stage “military theatre”. During this period, political and military competition between the two superpowers, the USA and the Soviet Union, was a dominant factor and the arms race was at its heights. By the end of the Cold War, the Arctic was heavily militarized, the region was one of the most important platforms for nuclear weapons systems and there was a strong sense of the enemy state being a threat to national security on both sides of the conflict. The

third stage is the transition stage, indicating the shift towards demilitarization of the region after the Cold War. The transition was inspired by the 1987 Murmansk speech of Mikhail Gorbachev, then the president of the Soviet Union, and included not only demilitarization but also an increase in civil cooperation in several fields such as economics, environmental protection and science (Heininen 2010a).

While masculine values of competition and control over territory can easily be linked to the two first stages of security, the transition phase brings in some new elements, indicating a possible shift in values. Heininen and Southcott (2010) recognize this shift, pointing out that a new vision has emerged, where the Arctic is increasingly being viewed as homeland for indigenous peoples and as a platform for international and interregional cooperation. This emerging vision is not only challenging the vision of the Arctic as a military playing field, but also the more traditional view of the region as primarily frozen, extreme, and exotic; or as a sparsely populated frontier; or as an area rich in natural resources, waiting to be exploited for the benefit of the nation.

But how does climate change and the melting of the Arctic ice influence this picture? Will the environmental changes threaten the peace and stability of the region, leading to a race for resources and competition between and among states? Or will climate change provide added incentives for cooperation among states and other stakeholders, changing the third security stage identified by Heininen from a transition stage to a more long term transformation stage?

The answers are not clear. Currently there are two competing discourses on climate change and security in the Arctic. One draws from the realist perspective in international relations, in which power politics between states dominate, the other can be linked to liberalism, emphasizing the mutual benefit of cooperation. However, certain aspects of the second discourse could also be identified with alternative approaches, calling for a more radical transformation of values and the relationship between states and citizens and between humans and nature. One purpose of this paper is to explore whether feminist approaches can be identified in this second discourse. Are feminine values still pushed to the margins in the field of geopolitics or have they entered the stage as an accepted player, capable of useful contribution to the shaping and implementation of policy?

Before digging deeper into the two competing discourses, some background information is needed, to explain the links between feminism and key theoretical approaches within international relations.

## **The state and hegemonic masculinity**

Feminism as an academic discipline grew out of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, but feminist perspectives first entered the international relations discipline at the end of the 1980s, about the same time as the end of the Cold War. A landmark book in feminist writings in international relations is Ann Tickner's book *Gender in International Relations* published in 1992. Tickner points out that because foreign

and military policy-making has largely been conducted by men, it should not be surprising that the discipline that analyses these activities is primarily about men and masculinity. “We seldom realize we think in these terms,” she writes, “...however; in most fields of knowledge we have become accustomed to equating what is human with what is masculine,” (Tickner 1992, p. 5).

Tickner traces how in realism, the most dominant school of thought within international relations, the ideal of the glorified male warrior has been projected onto the behavior of states. Throughout history, characteristics associated with masculinity, such as toughness, courage, power, independence, and even physical strength, have been those most valued in international politics. This glorification of male warrior attributes celebrates only one type of masculinity, however, subordinating other types of masculinities. Connell has used the term “hegemonic masculinity” to explain how one type of masculinity can occupy the hegemonic position in a pattern of gender relations. She defines hegemonic masculinity as: “... the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women,” (Connell 1995, p. 77). Hegemonic masculinity is sustained through its opposition to various less valued masculinities (e.g. homosexuality), and through its relations to various devalued feminine qualities, creating unequal power relationships between different groups of men, and between men and women. Tickner claims that in international politics, the

characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity are projected onto the behavior of states whose success as international actors is measured in terms of their power capabilities and capacity for self-help and autonomy (Tickner 1992).

Liberalism, the main competing theory of international relations to realism, is not free from masculine values underpinning basic assumptions, according to Tickner. While realists emphasize competition and power struggles, liberals are advocates of free trade and cooperation between states that will maximize benefits. According to liberals, human beings are driven by rational self interest. “The rational economic man” is offered in contrast to “the political man”. But perhaps the difference is not so great? The rational economic man has many similarities to the political man, but his aggressive passions have been tamed by the rational pursuit of profit (Tickner 1992). Women are still absent from the picture and feminine values related to caring, nurture and service, all of which are crucial for reproduction and the survival of the younger generation, are nowhere to be found.

After drawing up the picture of international politics as a masculine domain, Tickner asks: “How could feminist perspectives contribute anything new to its academic discourses?” (1992, p. 17). She argues that by privileging masculine values over feminine, the options available to states and their policy-makers to tackle the global challenges of the present are seriously constrained. Since knowledge about the behavior of states and the international systems depends almost entirely on assumptions that are derived from men’s experiences, a large part

of human experience is ignored, limiting our ability to come up with innovative and transformative solutions to problems.

## Competition or cooperation?

To evaluate if climate change is a security threat in the Arctic, one must be clear on what is meant by security. Are the main concerns with potential conflicts between states or should we be more concerned with human security challenges at the local level? The focus of attention is important, because it not only influences how policy is shaped but it directs what types of policy measures are implemented.

Already, it has been established by scientific research that the Arctic is extremely vulnerable to observed and projected climate change and climate changes are being experienced particularly intensely in the region. For example, in the past few decades, Arctic average temperature has risen at almost twice the rate of the rest of the world (Arctic Council 2004). The warming of the Arctic is causing thawing of the permafrost soils of the tundra, melting of glaciers and increasing erosion of the coasts by wave action and storms. These changes are impacting the natural environment, but the effects on human communities are also considerable. These effects can be viewed both as threats and opportunities. For example, the melting of ice can make extraction of resources easier and new shipping routes more viable. These new opportunities could, however, turn out to be potential sources of conflict, and thus pose a threat to security in the region (German Advisory Council 2008).

In an article published in *Foreign Affairs*, Borgerson (2008) argues that global climate change has given birth to a new scramble for territory and resources among Arctic powers. He warns that while other Arctic powers (Russia, Norway, Denmark and Canada) are in a race to claim additional territory in the region, the US is remaining on the sidelines. Borgerson is concerned that without US leadership to help develop diplomatic solutions to competing claims and potential conflicts, the region could erupt in an armed conflict, as states compete for newly accessible resources. “Although the melting Arctic holds great promise, it also poses grave dangers. The combination of new shipping routes, trillions of dollars in possible oil and gas resources, and a poorly defined picture of state ownership makes for a toxic brew,” he says (Borgerson 2008, p. 73).

Borgerson is approaching the topic from the traditional realist perspective, claiming that climate change is creating new threats to US national security, due to the competing territorial claims of Arctic states in order to gain access to and control over new shipping routes, energy resources, fishing grounds and other potential assets. Although he calls upon the US government to provide leadership in negotiating diplomatic solutions, rather than using their military power, he clearly expects that if left alone, the other states will use the threat of military force to sort out their competing claims.

The fear that the melting of the Arctic ice will lead to a competitive “scramble for resources” has been echoed in numerous media accounts in recent years. However, other authors and commentators point

out that cooperation is a more logical path to follow. For example, in a paper on the new security agenda in the High North, Bailes (2009) emphasizes the importance of cooperation of both states and non-state actors; “Even at this early stage in exploring the new northern agenda, it is crystal clear that the only viable solutions are based on win-win cooperation and on respect for planned, transparent, at least partly regulated frameworks of action by state and non-state actors alike,” (Bailes 2009, p. 3).

Whether competition or cooperation is the guiding light in present day interaction among Arctic states is not always obvious. The rhetoric is clearly one of cooperation. For the past two decades interregional cooperation has increased and numerous regional initiatives and forums have been created. The Arctic Council, for example, was established in 1996 as a high level intergovernmental forum to provide means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, especially in the fields of sustainable development and environmental protection (Arctic Council n.d.). Heininen (2010b) argues that at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Arctic is a stable and peaceful region with increased cooperation both within the region and between the region and the outside world. However, he also warns that this spirit of cooperation will not automatically continue when new challenges arise. For example, even though climate change is an environmental issue, it also has a security dimension related to state sovereignty and the national security of Arctic states. Thus, the issue may appear as a traditional security issue, calling for re-

militarization of the region, but this would be a mistake, since climate change needs a more comprehensive approach to security, one that includes issues related to both environmental security and human security (Heininen 2010b).

Feminist scholars have also highlighted this risk. For example, MacGregor warns that the securitization of climate change can lead to a “masculinization” of environmentalism. If climate change is securitized it is constructed as a problem that requires the kinds of solutions that are the traditional domain of men and hegemonic masculinity. This could mean that both military responses and exceptional measures that depend on downgrading of ethical concerns would be justified (MacGregor 2010). Challenging the traditional, state-centric view of security thus seems to be an important component of any attempts to securitize climate change in an effort to channel more resources into political processes. Rather than focusing on states, the more people-oriented approach of human security seems to be a more appropriate framework for analyzing threats posed by climate change.

The human security approach is particularly appealing for feminist researchers, who have generally sought to emphasize marginal groups and give voice to the powerless, using gender as an analytical tool. In fact, one can easily draw a parallel between the human security agenda and feminist security theory since the works of feminist scholars on war; gender and security have contributed to the emergence of human security. Feminist scholars writing about security have focused on the security of the individual, rather than the state, and among

other things they have contributed to the understanding of how structural violence can threaten the security of individuals and groups. The concept “structural violence”, as a term to describe social injustice, was first introduced by peace researcher Johan Galtung, in his article *Violence, Peace and Peace Research*. He uses the concept to explain how systems created by society can discriminate (often unintentionally) against individuals belonging to certain groups (Galtung 1969). Feminists have developed this concept to explain the exploitation of women under the patriarchal system, and pointed at the various dangers posed to certain groups in society, even if national security is not threatened. Although feminist scholars have been very critical of the traditional definition of security, their criticism did not reach mainstream discourse in security studies. The emergence of the human security agenda, however, changed this. Although the human security concept can be traced to policy institutions like the UNDP, or individual governments like Canada and Norway, Thórarinsdóttir (2009) points at three ways in which feminism influenced the human security agenda. First, the writings of feminist scholars on security issues helped to create fertile soil for the new concept. Second, women activist organizations had prepared the ground, by drawing attention to gender based violence in conflicts, and third, it can be argued that the increasing number of women in position of power, both in national governments and within international institutions, helped pave the way for new ideas to emerge and gain acceptance.

The broadening of the security concept, and the increasing emphasis on human

security, both globally and in the Arctic context, point towards a shift, where feminine values are given greater weight than before in security discourses. The emergence of new challenges, like climate change, has no doubt facilitated this shift. Yet, the more traditional views of security are still noticeable and might be more evident in state actions than rhetoric. For example, despite a decreased military presence in the Arctic since the Cold War, there is not any real evidence of disarmament in northern regions. While in some parts of the Arctic military bases and radar stations have been closed and troops have been withdrawn and activities stopped, in other parts military activities have been extended and new areas have been identified as strategically important (Heininen 2010a). Thus, it is clear that a certain tension exists between the need to cooperate and the tendency to prioritize the protection of one’s own interests. When it comes to utilization of resources that the melting of the Arctic ice will make more accessible, however, there seems to be little disagreement about the prediction that states in the region will be eager to exploit those resources. This is especially true of the oil and gas reserves, in spite of the fact that the utilization of those resources will further add to worldwide greenhouse gas emission, intensifying the ecological and human security problems created by climate change. When it comes to man’s right to exploit nature, dominant values seem to be unchallenged. This brings us to the feminist views of the relationship between humans and nature.



## **Humans and nature: domination or partnership?**

Climate change is an issue that does not fit well with the power-seeking behavior of states described in realist theories, since it is a phenomenon that has no respect for national boundaries and calls for collective action. From the time of the formation of the modern state in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, natural resources and geographical spaces have been viewed as resources for increasing state power and wealth. Further strengthening this view was the scientific revolution that also began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; it provided a more mechanistic view of nature than had been the previous norm. Prior to this revolution, humans were considered to form an integral part of nature, but during this period nature began to be viewed as a machine to be exploited for human benefit (Tickner 1992).

Ecofeminism has made important contributions towards understanding the relationship between humans and nature, pointing at the parallel between the patriarchal system, where the masculine dominates the feminine, with the domination of humans over nature. As MacGregor (2010) points out, however, ecofeminism has been suffering from a negative reputation as being spiritualist and essentialist and naturalizing of women's reproductive and domestic roles, and thus has received harsh criticism from many feminist scholars. Yet, some more recent ecofeminist scholars have rejected this essentialist connection between women and nature, stressing instead that the oppression of women and the domination of nature are both the result of patriarchy. "What all ecofeminists agree about is that there

are important connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature," writes Warren (1998, p. 264). Part of the problem is dualism in Western thought, whereby disjunctive pairs are seen as opposite (rather than complementary) and exclusive (rather than inclusive), and higher value (status, prestige) is attributed to that which is higher than to that which is lower. Examples of this would be twin concepts like: reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, human/nature, and man/woman. Whatever is historically associated with emotion, body, nature and women is regarded as inferior to that which is associated with reason, mind, culture, human (i.e. male), and men. This value-loaded dualism becomes a part of a larger conceptual framework, where socially constructed sets of basic beliefs, values, attitudes and assumptions shape how one views oneself and others. A conceptual framework is oppressive when it explains, justifies, and maintains relationships of domination and subordination (Warren 1998).

For ecofeminists, the solution to these problems includes dismantling the man made rift created between humans and nature. For example, Ruether writes: "We need to think of human consciousness not as separating us as a higher species from the rest of nature, but rather as a gift to enable us to learn how to harmonize our needs with the natural system around us, of which we are dependent part," (Ruether 1993).

## The potential for a value shift in the Arctic

Although Arctic discourses have traditionally been colored by some masculine themes, there is great potential for a counter discourse, celebrating feminine values as an important contribution to the achievement of peace, economic justice, and ecological sustainability. Already voices from this direction have made impact. For example, female leaders from Arctic indigenous communities have been influential in the discourse about the future of the region, bringing in alternative views on the relationship between humans and nature. The Nordic countries, which all belong to the Arctic Council, have also been known as states that pay attention to gender equality and social justice. For example, the five Nordic countries usually place in the top ranks in the Gender Gap Index, published annually by the World Economic Forum (Hausmann *et al.* 2010). The Scandinavian countries are also on the top of the list in Hofstede’s analysis of cultures where countries are listed according to how high the culture scores on characteristics he labels as feminine. The purpose of Hofstede’s study was to examine the role of values in the choices that states make in choosing their path for development (Tickner 1992). Thus, the Nordic countries have shown leadership at the global level in eliminating gender equality and should be more open than many other states to feminine views, challenging the more dominant masculine worldview.

As has been discussed in this paper, values and beliefs are important in how we view the world, and can be an influential factor in how policy is shaped and imple-

mented. In this light, exploring the values underlying discourses on climate change and security in the Arctic is an important step in our efforts to find innovative solutions to new security challenges associated with climate change. An argument has been presented, that dominant theories in international relations are based on a partial view of human nature that is stereotypically masculine. There is a need for a world view that is more inclusive of the feminine characteristics, emphasizing both the conflictive and cooperative elements of human nature. The focus of attention is important because it not only influences how policy is shaped but it directs what types of policy measures are implemented. By employing a feminist perspective, policy interventions can be more targeted, and more likely to address the real security needs of people that are at risk. This perspective gives hope for an international community that is more cooperative, capable of prioritizing long term common benefits over short term individual gains.

## End notes

<sup>1</sup> The title is borrowed from Borgerson (2008). In his article this sentence is used as a subheading for one of the sections, and is an obvious reference to the opportunities for “young men” to take advantage of emerging unknown territories in the Arctic and at the same time a call to the US authorities to turn their attention north to avoid being the loser in upcoming battles about resources.



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