

STATE-CENTRISM AND ITS LIMITATIONS IN UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL POLITICS: JUXTAPOSING REALIST AND FEMINIST SCHOOLS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORIES

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Abstract

State-centrism has enjoyed a core position in political theorizing but has been facing challenges since the decline of Greek power. The major blow to state-centrism came from critical and postmodern scholars in the post WWII era. By juxtaposing realist and feminist schools of thought, the article aims to draw distinctions between the respective accounts on accepting state as a given actor. The comparative analysis shows that the state-centrism in realism has produced limited vision on state as subject matter of IR, which resulted in further narrowed interpretations of national interests, threats, and security. The paper argues how the state-centrism has produced some dichotomies and narrowed interpretations of factors related to state-centrism that worked towards the othering processes of women in traditional bearings of International Relations (IR). The article concludes that state-centrism had been one of the useful ways in the past but not the most effective way to understand the ever-transformative nature of global politics of our time.

Keywords: Realism, Feminism, State-centrism, Limitations of State-centrism, Global Politics, IR Theories

INTRODUCTION

It is not unreasonable to say that majority of the International Relations (IR) theories consider state as the most important actor and related concepts to it as factors of analysis to understand global politics. Most of the grand theories of IR, i.e. Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, has taken the idea of state granted as “unproblematic category and is treated as the central actor”, which the Critical theorists and Postmodernists and many other such contestants find problematic.¹ While thinking state-centrism something as presupposed, Gilpin argues that “the fundamental nature of IR has not changed over the millennia”.² While emphasizing state-centrism, he also noted that IR continues to be a recurring struggle for power

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¹ J. Steans, L. Pettiford, T. Diez, and I. El-Anis, *An Introduction to International Relations Theory: Perspectives and Themes*, Essex: Routledge, 2013.

² R. Gilpin, *War and change in world politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981., p. 211.

and wealth among sovereign actors in an anarchic world.³ Holsti, as opposed to Gilpin, remarked that the states as foundational institutions faced major transformations as evident in: “reduced autonomy, growth of multiple loyalties, retrenchments of state functions, fragmentation of weak states”, to name few.⁴ Holsti observed, “we live in an era not of marginal alterations and adaptations, of growth and decline, but in an era of discontinuity with the past”.⁵

State-centrism in political theorizing has been facing challenges since the decline of Greek power.⁶ The idea of the state becomes a major area of contestation on its “meaning, reference, and analytical value”.⁷ Basiru distinguished three waves of challenges to state-centrism, the first one came from Cicero and other stoics in the form of cosmopolitanism, the second wave from Marxists before and after the First World War and; the third wave in the post Second World War from the neoliberals, critical theorists and post-modernists among many others.⁸ Beyond state-centrism, the study of global politics has been influenced by other concerns, i.e. “international political economy, socioeconomic development, human rights, non-state actors, and civil society”.⁹

This article relies on a comparative analysis of a few core ideas between realist and feminist theories of IR to debunk the state-centrism’s efficiency to understand present-day global politics. The following segment shows methodology, followed by how feminist framework views the state as an actor and why the subject matter of IR is limited as opposed to realist framework of IR. Then, it shows how the state-centrism has produced some dichotomies and narrowed interpretations of different factors related to state-centrism that works towards the othering process of women, and highlights feminists’ arguments on the flawed claims of universality and objectivity claimed by realists. The article concludes by arguing that although state-centrism had been one of the useful ways in the past, but not the most effective way to understand the ever-transformative nature of contemporary global politics.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ K. Holsti, “The Problem of Change in International Relations Theory,” in K. Holsti (ed.), *Kalevi Holsti: A Pioneer in International Relations Theory, Foreign Policy Analysis, History of International Order, and Security Studies*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016, p.54.

⁵ Supra note 4, at p. 39.

⁶ A. S. Basiru, “Is the State Still in International Relations Theorising?,” *Covenant Journal of Politics and International Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2013, pp. 34–43.

⁷ J. Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

⁸ Supra note 6.

⁹ T. Ruiz, “Feminist Theory and International Relations: The Feminist Challenge to Realism and Liberalism,” *Soundings Journal*, 2005, p. 1.

METHODOLOGY

The article looks at limitations of state-centrism in IR through comparative lenses of few core ideas of realism and feminist schools of thought. The method of analysis will be a qualitative content analysis of the literature produced on how these two schools viewed state-centrism in IR. The article relied on documentation as data collection, an interpretive technique “where external and internal documents, such as memos, electronic mails, annual reports, financial statements, newspaper articles, websites, may be used to cast further insight into the phenomenon of interest or to corroborate other forms of evidence”.¹⁰ The article uses a qualitative method of analysis of data derived mostly from existing secondary sources. The secondary sources of data for this article include but not limited to academic journals, books, monographs, news articles, reports, periodicals, and any other valid scholarly contents.

The interpretive research has been criticized for being biased and erroneous due to the subjective nature of the qualitative method of data collection and interpretation.¹¹ The prime method of data collection in interpretive research has been conducting interviews, which is avoided for Covid-19, time, and resource constraints. The author realizes that findings through content analysis of the secondary literature are criticized to be subjective. The internal validity remains weak due to the absence of experimental control.¹² The lack of control in this case makes it difficult to establish causality and findings form a single case, eventually suffers from inability to generalize. This shortcoming will be addressed by looking at the limitations of state-centrism from the comparative perspectives of realist and feminist school of thought in IR.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

A. ACTORS: STATE VS. INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY

Realist school posits the state as a primary referent in international politics and its interests and values are predominant above all.¹³ Acquiring power is the most rational, appropriate and ultimate goal for the state’s survival in an anarchic

¹⁰ A. Bhattacharjee, *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices*, Tampa: University of South Florida Scholar Commons, 2012, p. 107.

¹¹ *ibid*, pp.103-107.

¹² *Supra* note 10.

¹³ R. B. J. Walker, “Security, Sovereignty, and the Challenge of World Politics,” *Alternatives*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1990, pp. 3–27; K. Booth, “Security and Emancipation,” *Review of International Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1991, pp. 313–326; J. George, *Discourses of global politics: A critical (re) introduction to international relations*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994; J. Haslam, *No virtue like necessity: realist thought in international relations since Machiavelli*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, p.12.