

*100 pounds attempted at Tesco.* I was sitting in a pub in London with my friends from my school back in Japan when I got the notification. Another notification, *100 pounds attempted at Tesco.* I stared at my phone in confusion for around 5 seconds before I came up with a theory; I received the notification for my usage earlier in the day. But I had not spent 100 pounds at Tesco today, not ever. Then, it hit me, somebody had stolen my card. I then checked my pockets calmly. My wallet was no longer there. I immediately cancel all my cards at the pub, call my parents and they similarly panic. Yet, after the storm, comes a calm. They remind me that I am no longer in Japan, I need to be more careful. In retrospect, I had brought my Japanese sense of security perhaps too far at times like when I left all my electronics at Edinburgh Airport open and unattended whilst I went to use the bathroom. I would tell my friends this, they were all shocked and simultaneously found it funny. This was a notion that is entirely distant from them. I had grown up in an extremely safe country in which my physical security had never been questioned. From this instance two weeks prior—which ironically happened in the midst of this module—and this opportunity to reflect on the progression of my opinion regarding security, I have realised how much my perception has transformed. I have found that whilst my normative ideas regarding security have remained, I became acutely aware of how I had developed my sense of security based on my upbringing. This understanding has been established foremost through the initial connection between the social construction of the nation state and security. With this as my foundation of security, I found myself exploring my own construction of security in its academic and normative sense.

To trace this progression, I shall start with the first week in which we completed an exercise and every student drew a ‘map’ of their definition of security. My map had a simple house on the left hand side in which there were two stick people, having a meal and happily conversing. On the right, there was the sun beaming onto two more stick people, this time one of them sunbathing and the other drawing, something I imagined to be their hobby. Finally, in the middle, there was a stick child playing football in the front garden. This to me, was a reflection of my harmonious and yet individualistic conception of security; individuals feeling secure enough emotionally and physically, to pursue their self fulfilment whether that be through human connection or artistic and athletic endeavours. In retrospect, especially in comparison with other student’s maps that portrayed safety *from* security, it is clear to see that my security has been a result of how I have not felt a significant lack of security in my life. Yet, this realisation comes later on. It is safe to say, at this point my engagement with security had been in the individual sense, rather than any state sense.

The same week, I began to read about the constructed nature of security boundaries from which I formed a fundamental connection between the notion of security with the construction of a nation state in my mind. When I read the sentence, “[t]here was not, and there could not be, room for both: either the city of all and for all, or the state of someone”, I could vividly imagine this binary in my mind (69). I saw the incompatibility of a sovereign state and its infliction of a ‘society’, with an individual's autonomy. The opinion of renowned political theorists of Renaissance Italy such as Machiavelli who had argued this, resonated with me as it revealed the construction of a territorial trap—a tendency in International Relations (IR) to operate and enforce on the implicit assumption of the territoriality of a nation state—but its long standing flaws. The article focused on the historical progression of the construction of the nation state and its society and territorial boundaries to reveal how until the end of the 17th century, these now deeply ingrained norms of nation states and sovereignty in IR had not been cemented. Whilst it is often taken for granted that the field of IR emerged as state centric, to be presented with a conceptual timeline was enlightening to the claim I have often made that dominant axioms are built on constructed practices. This paper, which had detailed the process in which the nation state was constructed, set a foundational framework through which I processed the rest of the module. In sum, the socially constructed nation-state, sovereignty, and security, had been cemented in me from this week.

This anchoring point had then initiated my understanding of the impact of security being constructed in an academic but even more a personal sense. In terms of an academic sense, this is revealed in perhaps my favourite quote of this module: “They are strangers who exploit the society that is so kind as to house them (Anderson et al, 2016, 768)“. I found this quote uncomfortable to sit with. Yet, it was also powerful as it highlighted so clearly how in a nation state, most people are strangers, and yet, migrants in particular are portrayed within the European narrative as racialized outsiders. I believe it was the use of the word ‘houses’ that instigated this reaction in me. It points to the foundational nature of welfare in that it ‘houses’ people. It is often the bare minimum that people are provided with as they require this assistance. Such notions of a European community are stronger than the supposed pillar of European society, human rights. This concept of the nation state and its construction has seemingly become so ingrained that it is able to deny other aspects of what is supposed to give the European community a moral superiority.

The consequences of being able to view security as tied to the nation state then allowed me to view aspects of my life through a similar lens. This connection between the nation states, its Western framework, and security especially resonated with me in conversation about hostages. The understanding that European and American ideals of democracy and political rights had been instrumental in the emergence of hostages as they are known today was interesting as growing up in Japan, I did find hostages to be less the topic of conversation than perhaps in the US. Yet, when I did think of hostages, only one came to mind, a Japanese journalist called Kenji Goto.

I recall around the end of elementary school or the beginning of high-school, one day my father came to pick me up from my swimming lesson. Usually, my mother drove me back from swimming. Yet, this week, my mother apparently had somewhere important to be. She has always been extremely politically active, sometimes to the point where I was slightly uncomfortable. In retrospect, I now realise she was merely politically conscious and I was a child who did not understand much about politics. This is especially the case for the hostage case my mother was protesting for that day. She was attending the vigil for the beheaded Japanese journalist, Kenji Goto. Kenji Goto was a freelance video journalist who covered war and conflict, giving a voice to those in war zones. On his trip to Syria in October, he had been captured by the Islamic state. A video was made with him in an orange jumpsuit on his knees, held hostage. In it, an Islamic State militant with an English Accent called 'Jihadi John' accused the president at the time, Abe Shinzo, of partaking in the war in Syria and presented a choice to pay \$200 million—the same amount of money Abe had recently vowed for those fighting the Islamic State (Botelho, 2015). Yet, aligned to the recent American and British pledge at the time to refuse ransoms, Abe had not been able to resolve this hostage situation. At the time, I remember not really understanding why my mother was so upset; why it was political for her.

Now, when the topic of hostages was discussed in the course, I had a flashback of sorts and thought of Goto, as he had been virtually the only Japanese citizen taken as a hostage in my lifetime from Japan. As I learn of the distinctness of Japan, such a powerful economy who has until this point taken a pacifist stance, the fear that hit Japanese people had been immense. They had lost the sense of security that had been so ingrained in the Japanese identity. Something I had always prided myself on was that the Japanese passport is the strongest in the world. I had never felt endangered in a sense, even when abroad as I trusted the Japanese government's ability to protect me.

Thus, as I looked into the beheaded freelance journalist, I was shook to my core when I saw this quote: “I am not American. I am not British. I am Japanese...I can go” (Botelho, 2015). This was something I could relate to. Yet, Goto was put in danger due to his nationality. Now, I could see why my mother, whose cultural and ethnic identity had previously ensured security until now, had felt so passionate.

This was further revealed with the banners held by those in the vigil. There were signs by the movement for the release of Kenji Goto, where people held a sign that read ‘I am Kenji’ where the people expressed their solidarity with Goto. To me, however, this revealed how Goto now represented Japanese people. Due to the target of him based on his nationality, ‘I am Kenji’ meant every Japanese citizen is now in danger. Another banner that perhaps spoke security to me, was this sign in Japanese that when translated read, ‘Don’t make enemies. Diplomacy is about keeping the citizens safe’ (The Wall Street Journal, 2015). With an understanding that the nation state and correspondingly, security as socially constructed, this banner was extremely intriguing. It explicitly outlined the perceived role of the state as the protector and how international politics is still perceived to be based on the interaction of sovereign states.

I think this sense of societal identity that is tied to the state is especially prevalent in Japan. An ethnically homogenous nation with 98.5% Japanese citizens, the sense of cultural singularity and solidarity is extremely powerful (Diversity Abroad). Within this environment, as an ethnically Japanese person who has not necessarily felt discrimination or a lack of security, it is interesting to reflect upon my initial consideration of security. In a nation in which I have not felt othered, or even felt a sense of othering inside its territorial boundaries, it makes sense why my definition of security could and would be individualistic. The state’s role in providing security had never been a consideration, but a prerequisite. Perhaps, it is a testament of how Japan’s pacifist approach has been successful in guaranteeing the security of its citizens.

This realisation had come about as a result of comprehending the social construction of the nation state and its role in providing security. When attempting to think of an engaging hook for this piece, although most definitely unlucky, one could make a funny quip about how lucky I was for having such a pertinent example of my engagement with security. Whilst my personal normative ideals regarding security have not changed, the fundamental nature of the nation state for security is something I’ve definitely realised as necessary and ingrained. I would say I was slightly naive to the impact of the nation state on security. Thus, with this anchoring idea, I was able to understand why I started at the point with the map in the first week and critically examine how I continue to engage with the rest of the module.

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