

THE DOMESTICATION OF ‘SOCIETAL SECURITY’ OF THE COPENHAGEN SCHOOL: AFRICA IN FOCUS

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Keywords: Security/Societal Security/Critical Security Studies/Copenhagen School/Africa

Abstract

Africa has since time immemorial grappled with unique internal security threats which have hugely contributed to the underdevelopment of the region and only to be regarded as a ‘laughing stalk’ in the international relations. This paper is anchored on the argument that the proliferation of the post-cold war threats led to a paradigm shift that is, diverting the attention from the state as the only referent object to human beings as individuals. The essay thus, intends to examine and project the metaphysical travel of the Copenhagen school’s concept of societal security to Africa. This will be done by exhibiting the manifestations of the concept societal security as packaged by the Copenhagen school, in Africa in a bid to interpret its realities and understand Africa in regional and global security.

1.0 Introduction

The post cold war period, led to the emergence of non-military threats as opposed to military threats that targeted states during and then before the cold war. These post-cold war threats are within states and target and threaten the peaceful existence of human beings as individuals. Thus, a paradigm shift from state security to human security (that is, moving from the state as the referent object to individuals as referent objects) as articulated in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report. In Africa, the threats that emerged were majorly; the questions of identity, ethnicity, religion, migrations, secessionist movements, rogue statehood, civil wars, and many others. These threats not only contributed to what Job Brian calls insecurity dilemma, but also led to fragile states and fluid nationhood in Africa as advanced by Ali Mazrui in his works,

‘Africa between Nationalism and Nationhood’ (Mazrui, 1982). It is believed that the security threats that Africa is grappling with, trace their roots in the concept societal security of the Copenhagen school.

This essay thus, intends to advance an argument and project the metaphysical travel of the Copenhagen school’s concept of societal security to Africa. This will be done by exhibiting the manifestations of the concept societal security as packaged by the Copenhagen school, in Africa in a bid to interpret its realities and understand Africa in regional and global security. In other words, the security threats that continue to bedevil the region Africa trace their roots from the Copenhagen’s conception of societal security, and thus, the security mechanisms and frameworks put in place in Africa should intend to confront these threats that befit the description of societal security by the Copenhagen school. So as to pacify the region and liberate the continent from the vicious cycle of these threats, which have since become synonymous with Africa. In this case, the concept region, will mean the one with geographical attachments as envisaged by Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver in their work, ‘Regions and Powers,’ (Buzan and Weaver, 2003).

The essay will be premised on these pillars; the main argument, defining societal security, Critical security studies, the historical antecedents of Copenhagen school and societal security, identifying and discussing the manifestations of the concept societal security in Africa, as an indication for the concept’s metaphysical movement to Africa.

The essay is anchored on the argument that the proliferation of the post-cold war threats led to a paradigm shift that is, diverting the attention from the state as the only referent object to human beings as individuals. In other words, the move from state security to human security as advanced by the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report.

Since the identity of community rather than the sovereignty of the state ultimately constitutes the key variable in the societal security of the Copenhagen theoreticians (Theiler, 2003), then, Africa’s security threats such as; poverty, identity crises, refugees crisis, diseases, rogue statehood, ethnicity, environmental degradation and others have either led to or been a result of the attack on the societal identity and break down of social cohesion which form the theoretical

undertones of the concept societal security of the Copenhagen school. Against that background therefore, I find it prudent to argue beyond reasonable that most conflicts in Africa today are disputes over ethnicity, identity, religion and citizenship, thus, manifesting not only the metaphysical travel of the societal security of the Copenhagen school to Africa, but the concept also found its metaphysical home in the region as Africa.

2.0 The Concept Security

Security is taken to be about the pursuit of freedom from threat and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity against forces of change, which they see as hostile (Buzan, 1991). The bottom line of security is survival, but it also reasonably includes a substantial range of concerns about the conditions of existence. Quite where this range of concerns ceases to merit the urgency of the “security” label (which identifies threats as significant enough to warrant emergency action and exceptional measures including the use of force) and becomes part of everyday uncertainties of life is one of the difficulties of the concept’—Barry Buzan,” *New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-first Century*” *International Affairs*, 67.3 (1991), pp. 432-433.

In his classic essay ‘National Security as an ambiguous symbol’, Arnold Wolfers was concerned about the ambiguity of the concept security. He argued that it would be an exaggeration to claim that the symbol of national security is nothing but a stimulus to semantic confusion, though closer analysis will show that if used without specifications it leaves room for more confusion than sound political counsel or scientific usage can afford (Wolfers, 1952). Wolfers’s specifications refer not only of national security as a policy objective but also to the means for its pursuit, that is, national security policy.

3.0 Critical Security Studies

There appear to be two rather different ways in which Critical Security Studies (CSS) is understood (Wyn Jones 1999). First, CSS has been used as a typological device referring to all approaches critical of the prevailing realist-inspired orthodoxy within security studies.

Alternatively, some understand CSS as a distinct project in its own right that is based on a commitment to promoting emancipatory theories and practices of security. These two different meanings are reminiscent of Chris Brown's (1994) distinction between '**critical theories**' (lower case) in the more generic sense of the entire list of anti-foundational approaches, and '**Critical Theory**' (capitalized) in its Frankfurt School sense. This paper adopts this capitalized, Frankfurt School-inspired understanding of what the 'Critical' of CSS is and should be about.

The immediate origins of the CSS label lie in two recent developments: the end of the cold war; and major debates within the social sciences in general and international relations in particular, as to their nature, method, and purpose. As one analysis noted, 'given the symbiotic relationship between Security Studies and the cold war, it is not surprising that the end of the latter has led to a crisis in the former' (Bilgin, Booth, and Wyn Jones 1998: 141). In contrast to realist-inspired perspectives, CSS aims to develop an approach to the theory and practice of security that is dedicated to the promotion of emancipatory politics. This has led proponents of CSS to analyse forms of domination and insecurity that have either been ignored or marginalized by realist-inspired security studies. This has involved a reconceptualization of security that is;

(a) **Focused**: the theory and practice of security should promote emancipatory politics; (b) **Deeper**: security is understood as a derivative concept in as much as different understandings of world politics will deliver different conceptions of what security means and who are its ultimate referents; and (c) **Broader**: the threat and use of military force is neither the only (or necessarily most important) threat to security, nor the only means of providing security (Wyn Jones 1999).

At a deliberately general and abstract level, Ken Booth (2004) has defined CSS as: Both a theoretical commitment and a political orientation. As a theoretical commitment it embraces a set of ideas engaging in a critical and permanent exploration of the ontology, epistemology and praxis of security, community and emancipation in world politics. As a political orientation it is informed by the aim of enhancing security through emancipatory politics and networks of community at all levels, including the potential community of communities-common humanity.

To date, the CSS agenda has centred on four tasks: to provide critiques of traditional theory, to explore the meanings and implications of critical theories, to investigate security issues from critical perspectives, and to re-vision security in specific places (Booth 1997: 108). Arguably, the

CSS project will stand or fall on how effectively it can fulfill the last of these tasks and provide viable alternative visions and security policies in different parts of the world.

4.0 The Copenhagen school

The Copenhagen school of security studies is a school of thought in international relations which traces its roots from the Barry Buzan's book, 'People, States and Fear, first published in 1983. The term Copenhagen is believed to have been coined by Bill McSweeney (Mutiner, 2007). The theorists associated with this school include, Barry Buzan, Ole Weaver and Jaap de Wilde.

This brings me to postulate that the Copenhagen school is one of the schools of critical security studies (others being the Paris and Aberyswth schools) that obtain from the Critical theory-that is, anchored by Frankfurt school (which came up with the arrangement to critique Marxism, and leading scholars include Jurgen Habermas). The critical theorists contest the extent to which security can be analysed by a universal objectivity of scientific cognizance. The basic idea of critical theory of security studies is believed that security is always understood as security for someone specific and from the point of the specific intentions.

In other words, Critical security studies that obtain from Critical theory, criticizes the orthodox definitions of security (States being the referent objects and threats being military in nature and external), underscores the social construction of security, emphasizes the broadening and widening of the security agenda and emphasize the increased interdependency for security to offset the burden of defense spending and the comprehensive handling of threats.

Specifically, though, the distinctive contributions of the Copenhagen school in security studies have majorly been the concepts of **societal security** and **securitization** which led to the 'Regional Security Complex Theory, of Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver (Buzan and Hansen, 2009).

5.0 The Societal Security of the Copenhagen school

Buzan et al (1993) conceptualize the concept societal security as the ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible threats. From this conception, the Copenhagen theoreticians intended to account for the phenomenon of societal identity and cohesion as sources of instability (Ilgit and Audie Klotz, 2014). In other words, the security of a

society is compromised when that society perceives that its identity is threatened. In this case, identity as a set of ideas and practices that identifies particular individuals as members of certain social group, thus, societal security meant to bridge the gap between the state security and human safety (Anderson, 1991).

The concept emphasizes the duality of the state and societal security (Weaver, 1993). That is, societal security as a sector of state security and also a referent object in its own right. In other words, whereas state security is concerned about threats to its sovereignty (if the state loses its sovereignty, it will not survive as a state), societal security is concerned about threats to a society's identity (if a society loses its identity, it will not survive as a society) (Buzan et al, 1993). The Copenhagen theoreticians argued that although, the state is a referent object for the military, political, economic, societal and environmental sectors (Buzan, 1991), society is also a referent object for the societal sector (Weaver, et al, 1993).

In that manner therefore, the Copenhagen theoreticians identified threats to societal security, those that alter and also threaten the individual existential security. These may include may include: cultural cleansing, ethnic cleansing, regionalism and separatism, migrations, depopulation, discrimination, religion, exclusionary nationalism and others.

6.0 The Societal security and Africa

The aspects of the societal security of the Copenhagen school speak volumes in understanding and interpreting the realities of Africa in regional and global security. In other words, Africa's security threats trace their origin from the conception of the societal security of the Copenhagen school.

This part of the essay discusses the manifestations of the societal security of the Copenhagen school in Africa. There are these manifestations that legitimize the metaphysical travel of the Copenhagen school to Africa. These can be discussed as below:

The 1994 Rwandan genocide serves as a clear manifestation of the societal security of the Copenhagen school and its metaphysical travel to Africa. The conflict between the majority

Hutus against the minority Tutsi claimed over 800000 lives and events that preceded it, present a clear example of social conflict based on exclusionary nationalism and the consequent denial of citizenship (Keller, 2014). The construction of divisive identities by colonialists by favouring the-minority Tutsi and making them superior at the expense of the-majority Hutu, who felt inferior and their absolutely threatened, exacerbating the tendency of few oppressing the many, thus precipitating the majority Hutu to raise the Tutsi in what famously known as the Rwandan genocide.

Class politics and struggles in Africa is also another indicator of the metaphysical travel of societal security of the Copenhagen school to Africa. Ake and Onimode found the notion of class politics and struggles and the consistent consumerist pattern of the dominant class as a causal factor in the conflictual and unstable nature of political interaction and attitude in Nigeria (Ake, 1989, 43-65). The presence of the irreconcilable struggles between an existent dominant class and subordinate classes over who should hold power is the order of the day in Africa.

The dominant social forces struggle to maintain their domination and the subordinate social forces struggle against their subordination and its related disabilities (Ake, 1989). This is because the identity and hence the security of the subordinates are threatened by the subordination of those in power. In other words, the idea of class politics is central in explaining not only conflicts in Africa and the formation of political attitudes and interactions, but also gives a better understanding of economic, social and political inequality.

Ethnic conflicts in Africa provide a true reflection that the concept societal security has not traveled to Africa, but rather successfully found a home. Almost every country in Africa has grappled with either severe cases or some aspects of ethnic conflicts which has contributed more to the fragility of the continent and making it more susceptible to other insecurities. It is believed that ethnic conflicts in Africa are contagious and spread very quickly across borders like cancer cells (Irobi, 2005). Competition for scarce resources is believed to be the major cause of ethnic conflicts in Africa. In multi-ethnic communities such as Nigeria and South Africa, ethnic communities struggle and compete for jobs, property, language, property, education, social amenities and others (Irobi, 2005). Ethnic conflicts have occurred and continue to occur in most of the African countries such as; Kenya, South Sudan, Mali, Rwanda, Somalia, Ethiopia and

many more. All these have provided a safe haven to the societal security of the Copenhagen school.

Religious conflicts in Africa are also a clear manifestation of the societal security of the Copenhagen school. Although conflicts are often caused by a variety of other factors, such as ethnicity and race, religion has also been at the heart of much of today's atrocities on the continent. Many African countries have been torn apart by religious conflicts, claiming the lives of many and forcing a thousand into exile. This has been evident in Central African Republic, where the Seleka Moslem rebels target Christians and the in turn, the armed Christians target Muslim civilians. There other African countries most affected by religious conflicts include; Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, Kenya and others. These kinds have continuously ploughed the ground for other sophisticated conflicts like political and ethnic conflicts, thus, leading to a permanent insecurity condition in the region as given to us by Job Brian. Against that background therefore, it is plausible for to argue that the concept of societal security of the Copenhagen school found its way to Africa.

7.0 Conclusion

Conclusively thus, it is beyond reasonable doubt that the Copenhagen theoreticians' connotations of the concept of the societal security as source of conflicts have not only metaphysically travelled, but the concept has also found a metaphysical home in region of Africa. As manifested in the frequency, consistence and nature of conflicts and other security threats that befall the continent.

However, all these have plunged the continent into deep despair and bred a moment of darkness; there is still an emancipatory hope for the continent. Although, the projects of Pan-Africanism and the unification of Africa have not achieved the desired outcomes, there are still grounds for optimism, these include, the deepening of democratic ethos in the continent, which is believed to unleash a love of freedom that will supersede fissiparous tendencies that underlie the various notions of Africanity. In other words, democracy as a 'magic word' as given to us by Jurgen Habermas of the Frankfurt school, is the only liberator of the continent. This is because in democracy, we count heads not break them.

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