

THE VOLATILE NATURE OF SECURITISATION THEORIES: LESSONS FROM Ogoni Crisis of 1995 and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine in 2022

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Abstract

Following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the theories of securitisation are once again in need of reconsideration of the most appropriate theory for assessing the issues and crises related to security. In order to situate the discourse within the proper context for thematic discourse, Steven Smith's position that traditional views of securitisation are no longer relevant will be taken as paradigm. Smith argues that following the 9/11 attack over the World Trade Centre, traditional securitisation theories are not relevant since other factors beyond the state motivate conflicts. Through the method philosophical analysis, this study argues that Smith's position that traditional approach to securitisation has been found to be misleading following the Russia-Ukraine crises where states and military might are the referent frame. Upon further exploration however, this study takes the position that all theories of securitisation are useful for the comprehension of the factors and conditions that initiate and make conflicts to thrive. What motivates the correct theory will depend on the particular context, as there is no one theory that fits for all circumstances. As way of reinforcing the validity of this thesis, this study uses the Ogoni Crises of 1995 aside the Russo-Ukraine conflict as paradigms.

Keywords: 9/11 Attack, Ogoni Crisis, Russia-Ukraine Tensions, Securitisation Theories, Steven Smith.

Introduction

In this essay, three tasks are to be undertaken in order to be able to arrive at the aim of analysing the proposal of Steven Smith¹ over the limitations of the traditional realist view of security, especially following the motivations and the consequences of the September 11 (9/11, hereafter) attacks. The first task is to agree with Smith that indeed the concept of security is essentially loaded and shy of fixed understanding. The second task is to disagree with him that there are instances wherein the state is the reference frame and other component units are subordinate. This is demonstrated in the Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, 2022. The implication here is that the traditional view to understanding security is very much relevant. The third task is to also agree with Smith that there are some instances where the non-traditional approaches to the concept of security overrides the traditional approach. This is demonstrated in the Ogoni Crises of Nigeria, during the dictatorial regime of the late General Sanni Abacha.

Having established its task or objective, it is pertinent to state from the outset, the core thesis of this essay by insisting that one needs to be pay attention to the context of the discourse. What this means is that one needs to look closely at events in order to be able to establish whether a realist view of securitisation can function as an appropriate framework or whether a post-positive driven approach like feminist theory suffices. The lesson from this is that one cannot completely wish away the state as a referent object, as other components or units can also serve. In the same way, one cannot also place all emphasis on these other components and pay less attention to the centrality and focus of the state. These are the two deductions from the critical analysis of Smith and the limitations of the realist account of securitisation for assessing the 9/11 attacks. The position of this essay is inspired from the work of Smith² himself who in one of the passages of the work agrees with Ken Booth³ that the idea of

¹. Steven Smith, "The Contested Concept of Security", in *Security Studies and World Politics*, ed. K. Booth (Boulder: Lynn Rienner, 2005), 27-61

². Smith, "The Contested Concept of Security", 28-29

³. Booth, "Security and Emancipation", *Review of International Studies* 17 no. 1, (1991): 313-326

security is a derivative from issues connected to politics and economics. These are issues that are emergent from the regions of conflict and then command the scrutiny of security policies. This passage is the one that presents the implication that one needs to situate every conflict and violent agitations within a context in order to see which security theory or framework is more viable or plausible. To understand how this essay arrived at this, it is helpful to undertake a short review of Smith. This is important to assist with making the argument of Smith as lucid as possible.

Steven Smith on the Various Concepts of Security and the 9/11 Attacks

The essay written by Steven Smith “The Contested Concept of Security” sets out to achieve a fundamental aim – to show that the idea of security is never fixed but always subject to revision. He bemoans the attempts of the traditional realist school of thought which is deeply influenced by positivism, to provide a sweeping understanding of the concept of security – one which is fixed and true irrespective of context. As the separate study of Carnesale and Nacht indicate, all realist definitions of security, irrespective of their individual divergents, still come to agree with one another that the preservation and the protection of the state is paramount.⁴ Since the threat to the existence of a state are in the form of the military, then it is also the case that to attain their sovereignty and integrity, a state must also have its military.⁵

Realist conceptions of the idea of security, it needs not further elaboration is a clear indication of the priority given to positivism whose approach to studying reality is both empirical and scientific.⁶ Its aim is to settle on the assessment of reality by paying less attention to individual

⁴. A. Carnesale and M. Nacht, “Forward”, *International Security* 1 no. 1, (1976): 2

⁵. J. De Bahl, “Security: An Essentially Contested Concept?” *E-International Relations* (2014) Available at <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/08/24/security-an-essentially-contested-concept/> (Accessed March 2, 2022).

⁶. S. McGlinchey. *Foundations of International Relations*. (London: Bloomsbury 2021):70-71

biases and prejudices. The distinction between theory and fact as well as the neutrality of the assessment of fact is held in high esteem.⁷ This is the foundation of the realist understanding that the concept of security is fixed and centres on the state and military might irrespective of circumstances or other components such as the individual and the politico-economic realities of humans.⁸

Smith disagrees with this fixed and neutral free understanding of the concept of security. He returns to Walter Gallie's⁹ argument by saying that it is not possible to have a fixed concept of security, since the concept is a contested area. Smith proceeds to state that a fixed understanding of security is not only inconsistent, but it is also not in line with how various groups within a state perceive threats and danger. The trado-realist conception of security with the state as the central actor cannot be sustained without limitations.¹⁰ Smith demonstrates this by citing the limitations of the trado-realist approach to security in the 9/11 attacks. The 9/11 attacks have been able to show that there are instances wherein a state may not be the central actor. On the one hand, the United States is an actor, on the other hand it is not Iraq that is the other principal actor but an element, a terrorist group in Al-Qaeda. This is why Smith holds that "it may be difficult to prove, for example, that Osama bin Laden ordered the attacks to take place in the places and at the times that they did. This makes it difficult for states to negotiate with such organisations especially when they do not share a similar set of goals."¹¹ Following his confidence that the trado-realist account of security is limited across

7. Steven Smith and P. Owen. Alternative Approaches to International Theory. In: J. Baylis and S. Smith, (eds). *The Globalization of World Politics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005):271-293

8. B. McSweeney. *Security, Identity and Interests*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999):145

9. Walter Gallie. Essentially Contest Concepts. *Proceedings of The Aristotelian Society* 56 (1956): 167-198

10. See E.A. Kolodziej. Renaissance in Security Studies? Caveat Lector. *International Studies Quarterly* 36 no. 4, (1992): 421-438; and M. McDonald. *Security, The Environment and Emancipation: Contestation Over Environmental Change*. (London: Routledge 2012): 18-19

11. Smith. The Contested Concept of Security, 32

many ways, Smith considers some six non-traditional account of security as a way of justifying his conviction that given the outlook that the idea of security is not fixed, some elements will be ranked higher than other elements.¹² The first school he considers is the Copenhagen school.

The Copenhagen school comprises of notable scholars such as Barry Buzan and Ole Waever. The main thrust of the Copenhagen school is the need to retain the emphasis on the state as the referent object. Other aspects of the state such as ecological, economic, political and socio-cultural cannot be underestimated for understanding how conflicts and threats emanate and can be dealt with. It is however important to illustrate that even when the state has other important components, it continues to rank as the referent object. Following this reality, Smith argues that this makes the Copenhagen School not properly situated in assessing the 9/11 attacks.

Constructivism is another important theoretical framework on security which was considered by Smith in a bid to establishing the elusive nature of security, following the 9/11 attacks. The fundamental position of the constructivist school or theory is that identities and interests are crucial in any analysis of conflicts. The constructivists see culture to be causal and not constitutive of a status quo, which the 9/11 attack has been able to disclose. The identities of those who were indicted as the primary elements of the 9/11 attacks cannot be reconciled with that of the states that support them. For instance, most Muslims are sympathetic to the cause of those who perpetrated the 9/11 attacks such that they are not willing to accept any evidence that suggest thus.

The critical security studies approach to security explored by Smith is the Welsh school, whose foremost proponents are: Booth¹³ and McDonald.¹⁴ For them, security is just the same as emancipation. And emancipation is

^{12.} Smith The Contested Concept of Security, 32

^{13.} Ken Booth. Security and Emancipation. *Review of International Studies* 17 no. 1, (1991): 313-326

^{14.} M. McDonald. *Security, The Environment and Emancipation: Contestation Over Environmental Change*. (London: Routledge 2012):21

conceived as rescuing people from physical limitations that makes life difficult for them.¹⁵ McDonald adds that these limitations or constraints are contextual.¹⁶ For this school, it is the people that are the referent object.¹⁷ Following the application of this theory to the 9/11 attacks, Smith says it is difficult to establish a stand between the volatile notion of security and emancipation as well as which of them is more appropriate within the context of those who carried out the September 11 attacks.¹⁸ Who do they wish to emancipate? Westerners or Middle Easterners, since there are groups within each rank, that feel justified that the attacks are some forms of expression of the outburst of the excesses of the West over the world.

Another securitisation framework explored by Smith is the feminist security studies. The primary contention of this framework is the need for the concept of security to understand and admit into its analyses the role that women play in the issues related or connected to conflicts and violence. As Smith maintains, the feminist perspective is convinced that it is only when it shown, the place of women in international relations can the notion of power be well understood. Smith however agrees that feminist security studies much as it is considerable it has destabilising implications for security studies. Smith is also convinced that in the last analysis the issues of gender and how women were perceived by the hijackers and in the ranks of Al-Qaeda reflect the considerable view that the place of women cannot be treated as a side issue.

The poststructuralist view of security is of the outlook that the traditional idea of security and a referent object is no longer viable. Emphasis on the narratives provided by the participants to the conflict plays a principal role. Smith argues that the view of the poststructuralist is well entrenched in the occurrences of the 9/11 attack. This is the case since the Bush

^{15.} Booth. *Security and Emancipation*, 319

^{16.} M. McDonald. *Security, The Environment and Emancipation: Contestation Over Environmental Change* 2012):21

^{17.} J. De Bahl. *Security: An Essentially Contested Concept?*

^{18.} Smith, *The Contested Concept of Security*, 32

administration's narrative on the one hand and the story told by Al-Qaeda, on the other hand are not at par. This means that there is a need to focus on coming to understanding the other. It is through understanding the other does the other during conflicts and violence that one begins to work towards a reliable securitisation network.

Human security sees insecurity as a general issues that cuts through all human societies. It is a global phenomenon that is replete in all societies. Hence, the essential feature of this form of securitisation is that material sufficiency is at the core of human security. Smith argues that the human security outlook focuses over the fact that for most of those who sympathise with the cause of the 9/11 attackers, the level of material sufficiency of the West and the exploitation of the other countries justifies the attack. In other words, they support the attacks based on the background of poverty and lack which is not endemic in the United States but may be seen as a causative from the United States.

Following the exposition of these six non-traditional theories, Smith makes his point by stating that their individual positions over the 9/11 attacks and the consequences are suggestive of his thesis that the idea of security as a concept lacks consensus. On this note, he goes on to state that other concepts such as state, community, emancipation and how the intertwine with the individual or groups are also under contestation.

As way of critically analysing the position or argument of Smith, there will be two sections ahead that will focus on the remaining two tasks of instances where Smith's position is both valid and invalid in application, using an instance for each. What has been done thus far, however, is the successful discourse over the first task wherein the agreement with Smith that indeed the concept of security is loose and fixed as opposed to the trado-realist approach that wants it fixed, to see the state as the main component and military might as the expression of this.

Stephen Smith and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine: A Realist Analysis

In February 2022, authentic efforts have been put in place to see the military occupation of Ukraine by Russia. It is record that Ukraine used to be a part of the vast former USSR which broke up in 1991.¹⁹ With closer ties to the West, Ukraine is on the verge of joining NATO but intends to remove all political obstacles first. On the other hand, Russia is wary of any military threat that this union may have on her territory. Child et al. report that there is a huge military presence moving close to Ukraine's capital, Kyiv.²⁰ Heavy missiles and similar artilleries have been witnessed to be deployed against residential areas in some parts of Kyiv.²¹

The contention of this essay is not to go into details of the Russia-Ukraine crises. However, an important point which this essay seeks to pass is that there is no way that one can simply dismiss the traditional realist perspective to understanding the idea of securitisation. Under this kind of condition, it is clear that the realist ways of perceiving what it means for securitisation is well-endorsed. This is because a critical look at the idea of security from the angle of the traditional realist view, the state is a referent entity. A critical assessment of the tensions emanating in Ukraine, following the occupation of Russia, one can easily see that this is a situation of conflict between two states.

From the situation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, it is also stated clearly that military might is a way through which the state can counter security threats from the outside. What this means, following the proposal of Smith is that even when the traditional approach to security may not be

^{19.} Michael Parenti. *The Sword and The Dollar*. (New York: St. Martins Press 1989):56

^{20.} C. Child, Z. Rasheed and A. Harb. Russia-Ukraine Live News: Huge Russian Convoy Enters Ukraine. (2022) Available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/28/us-announces-plan-to-expel-russian-diplomats-from-un-liveblog> (Accessed March 2, 2022)

^{21.} C. Child, Z. Rasheed and A. Harb. Russia-Ukraine Live News: Huge Russian Convoy Enters Ukraine.

plausible for assessment of the 9/11 attacks, it does not suffice for the Russia-Ukraine crises. This is the case because it is a case of one state invading another state with her military might. Conversely the other state is also standing her ground as a state with her military powers. Under this condition, the traditional realist way of assessing conflicts and violence is well justified. This is why this essay maintains that contexts really matter regarding which of the theories of security can be used for examining conflicts. Within the context of the Russia-Ukraine crisis, the trado-realist approach to understanding security is justified. However, within the context of the 9/11 attacks, upon which Smith's analysis is based, the trado-realist framework is not pliable. Another example which confirms the context character of the factors that determine how security can be defined and assessed will be via the Ogoni Crisis of Nigeria. This other example is crucial in assisting with similar scenarios as the 9/11 that was provided by Smith for making sense of how one ought to consider securitisation and assess same.

Smith, the Concept of Security and the Ogoni Crisis of 1995

Ogoni land, in Niger Delta area happened to be where the 50 percent of Nigeria's oil is drilled. Prior to the discovery of the oil, Qgoni land's major occupation was fishing but immediately after 1956 when oil was discovered since, then up till date the Ogoni land has been suffering of oil spillages.²² The cases or instance of oil spillage destroys all forms of aquatic-related sources of livelihood as well crop cultivating activities.²³ It is on record that over the years about 30 billion dollars have been raked in as oil revenue from Ogoni land. Yet they have virtually nothing to show for it. They live in abject poverty. It is quite ironical and unimaginable that the Ogoni people suffer just because crude oil is found in their soil.²⁴ They neither benefit directly from the huge revenue nor are they part of its revenue allocation scheme. Their environment remains

^{22.} Elizabeth Isichei. *A History of Nigeria*. (Lagos: Longmans 1983):29

^{23.} A.A. Kadafa. Oil Exploration and Spillage in The Niger Delta of Nigeria. *Civil and Environmental Research*. 2 no. 3 (2012):2

^{24.} O. Orubu and E. Ehwareme. The Nigerian Oil Industry: Environmental Diseconomies, Management Strategies and The Need For Community Involvement. *Journal of Human Ecology* 16 no. 3 (2004): 200-220

devastated with ecological problems spiralling.²⁵

The Ogoni people continued to suffer this agony of deprivations and brutality with pockets of cries and shouts of pro tests until 1990 when they organized themselves and founded the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP).²⁶ Almost immediately, this new agitated group within became a rally point through which the voice of the Ogoni people can be heard. It emerged to assist the plight and cause of the Ogoni to correct the perceived injustice and neglect that has evolved as a security threat to their survival as a people in Nigeria. The consequence of this struggle was the surfacing of the Ogoni Bill of Rights of December in 1999, a few years after some martyrs.

Clear as this might be, the state does not support the agitations of the group MOSOP. The regime of the then General Sanni Abacha used the powers of the state to suppress the protest of the group. Eventually, the hanging of the President of MOSOP, Ken Saro Wiwa caused international outburst over the excesses of the state and how it treats its citizens. Regardless of the details surrounding the Ogoni Crisis of 1995, what is of primary interest here is the kind of narratives which exists between the state and the core representatives of MOSOP and the implications it has for the evaluation of a security framework.

On the one hand, the situation is a vindication of the position of Smith that it is not possible to use the traditional realist position on security for the 9/11 attacks. The same can be said of the Ogoni crisis. Here, the state is dealing with elements within itself. The state sees this MOSOP group as an internal threat to the stability of the country as a whole. Unless the element is dealt with, the state may be found as incompetent or lackadaisical. As a result, the state uses its military might to crush the top executive of the MOSOP agitation group who were fighting to the need

^{25.} A.A. Kadafa. *Oil Exploration and Spillage in The Niger Delta of Nigeria*, 3

^{26.} O. Orubu and E. Ehwareme. *The Nigerian Oil Industry: Environmental Diseconomies, Management Strategies and The Need For Community Involvement*, 213

to consider the plight of the region where the crude oil of Nigeria is being extracted for national benefit. Clearly, a non-traditional perception of security is needed for comprehending the Ogoni crisis.

By using the critical studies proposal and the views of the Welsh school where security is seen to be close to emancipation, a better analysis can be realised. The MOSOP is an element that recognises the neglect of the Nigerian government toward the environmental insecurity of the Ogoni people. However, the Nigerian government was operating using the traditional realist view of security which saw internal threat in the ways that external threats are perceived and diminished via military force. As the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has been used to demonstrate the contextual nature of the securitisation theory on the foreign same, the same has been used for re-assessing the case of the MOSOP during the dictatorship of the late General Sanni Abacha. These two instances are used to endorse the position of Steven Smith concerning the application of securitisation theories in the assessment of conflicts.

When the poststructuralist approach is used, another way of seeing the issue suffices. Particularly, the stories told of the effects of oil spillages in the Ogoni environment runs contrary to the story of the Nigerian federal government which perceived MOSOP as a threat to national stability. Clearly, from this Smith is correct to have taken the stance that the idea or notion of security is volatile.

Conclusion

In this essay, the task has been to argue along with Smith (2005) that indeed the traditional realist view of security is not reliable for understanding the 9/11 attacks. However, the position of this essay is that this does not make the traditional realist position useless in understanding the concept of securitisation. As a way of making this claim forceful, the Russia-Ukraine crisis of 2022 is used as paradigm. Analogously, there is no doubt that there are other instances wherein non-traditional theories or frameworks of security have been particularly useful, as Smith maintains. The Ogoni crisis has been briefly examined

from the Welsh school and the Poststructuralist frameworks. The point being shown here is that just as Smith maintains, it is important to consider the context wherein violence or conflicts arise. This will determine the appropriateness of a particular theoretical framework on security. It is precisely for the reason of emphasising contexts and the fact that the notion of security cannot be fixed that this essay finds Smith's submission to be tenable. Hence, the work of Smith is justified in the sense that it calls attention to the case of contexts. However, any attempt to examine the work that it condemns totally the use of traditional realist perception of securitisation must be assessed critically.

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