

Rethinking Security in Africa: A Critical Feminist Approach

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the intersection of critical feminist theory and security studies, exploring its potential to address pressing security challenges in Africa. By drawing on the philosophical foundations of critical theory, such as the works of Hegel, Karl Marx and particularly the works of Jürgen Habermas on cognitive concepts of interest, this research investigates the adoption of critical feminist approaches to security scholarship, discourse, and praxis. Using critical analysis and phenomenological methodology, this study highlights the successes and challenges of liberal feminists' engagement with critical theory in the international security sphere. The paper's key contribution lies in its assessment of the applicability of critical feminist security approaches to the African context, and its quest to answer the question, can critical feminist approaches to security provide a nuanced understanding of security challenges in Africa and inform effective solutions? The paper also provides recommendations for a gendered security scholarship and praxis to mitigate local and international security challenges and promote sustainable peace and development.

Keywords: Critical theory, Concept of Interests, Feminism, Gendered security, Phenomenology, Security.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to critically examine the critical feminists' approaches to security and its applicability to contemporary African security challenges. To begin with, Africa's security landscape is characterized by a complex array of challenges,

which can be comprehensively understood through the prism of global political economics, culture, and regional/local dynamics.¹ The legacy of the Cold War, marked by proxy wars and ideological divisions, has had a lasting impact on Africa's security trajectory. This has been exacerbated by the effects of neoliberal economic policies and globalization, which have led to increased inequality and poverty; competition for resources fuelled by unfair global economic policies,^{2,3} the spread of extremist groups and terrorists and prolonged conflict and military interventions.

Furthermore, the influence of foreign powers and corporations in Africa's resource extraction, debt burden, and economic dependence has contributed to the continent's insecurity. Cultural imperialism, media misrepresentation, and the imposition of globalized norms and values have also induced identity crises, eroding traditional practices and exacerbating social unrest. At the regional and local levels, Africa's security challenges are compounded by regional conflicts; State fragility, weak institutions, and hydra-headed corruption; limited capacity and reduced impact of civil society and social movements and lack of political will.^{4,5} These interconnected factors have culminated in Africa's cascading security challenges, underscoring the need for a nuanced understanding of the continent's complex security landscape.

Security is intricately linked with other critical issues, including gender, which is a socially constructed concept rooted in patriarchal systems. Feminists aim to challenge and dismantle these oppressive structures, promoting a more equitable and just

1. Jean-François, Bayart. *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. (Cambridge: Polity Press: 2009) pp-123-144
2. John S. Saul. *Development After Globalization: Theory and Practice for the Embattled South*. (London: Zed Books. (2006) pp- 103-124.
3. Patrick Bond. *Looting Africa: The Economics of Exploitation*. (London: Zed Books. (2006).pp-23-25, 103-120
4. Patrick Chabal and Daloz Jean-Pascal. *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press.1999) pp-23-40, 104-110
5. Williams Reno. *Warlord Politics and African States*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. 1998)

society. Feminists in their diversity have different approaches to interrogating issues that pertain to women's lived experiences. They ask questions such as: how feminist approach to security identify and address women' concerns of security? How does the adoption of critical theory with its underpinning ideology of social reflection, removing identity distortions and working towards an ideal reality, enhance the feminists' agenda of emancipation and inclusion? Does this adoption make contributions to the emergence of gendered security? Does it enhance gender mainstreaming in security? How does the gains of this method impact contemporary security concerns in Africa? In a bid to explore these questions and attempt to provide answers to them, this paper introduces critical feminist theory as a framework for analysing and addressing the seemingly daunting security challenges in Africa.

Critical feminist theory is a framework that analyses and addresses security challenges in societies by challenging patriarchal norms, as the masculine norms affect and shape security policies and practices.⁶ It highlights gendered experiences, focusing on how security challenges differently impact women and men in Africa. By exposing power dynamics, it illuminates how power is exercised and maintained through security policies and practices, often perpetuating inequality and oppression. By promoting inclusive security, that is, advocating for security approaches that prioritize human security which brings to the fore, spectrum of human security challenges and peace-building. Also, it centred African feminist perspectives, amplifying the voices and experiences of African women and feminist scholars in shaping security policies and practices.⁷

⁶. Cynthia Enloe. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. (California: University of California Press. 1990). pp- 2-4

⁷. Ann J. Tickner. *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security*. (Columbia: Columbia University Press. 1992).

Feminist approaches to security abound. Scholars such as Tickner, J. Ann,⁸ Iris Young, Lara Sjoberg, Kristen P. Williams and Ryerson Christies among others have criticised the absence of gendered perspective on war and security, they also argued extensively for feminist perspective on security issues on the basis that existing scholarship and discourse on security especially international security are essentially narrow in focus, plagued with gender blind spot and dominated by male/ men's perspective and interpretation of what constitutes security.^{9,10} They also focused on feminists' interpretations of security while scholars like Sorpong Peou¹¹ criticized the feminists' efforts at broadening the lexicon and scope of security, highlighting their flawed ideas and methodology.

This paper builds on these feminists' efforts and approaches, examines the underpinning theory of these feminists' idea and approaches. This paper surpasses previous scholarship in this field by its interrogation of the intersection of critical theory, security studies, Habermas' concept of interests and security challenges in Africa. It also with its adoption of phenomenological method evaluates the goal and achievement of the approaches of the critical feminists, its relevance and role in the emergence of gendered security as well as its applicability to contemporary African security challenges.

This research begins with the exploration of the concepts of security, gender, feminism and Feminist approaches to security, analyses critical theory and critical feminist approaches'

8. Ann J. Tickner, and Laura Sjoberg. "Feminism." In *International Relations Theories*, ed. Smith, S., Dunne, T., and Kurki, M. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2010) pp.

9. Christie Ryerson. "Critical Voices and Human Security: To Endure, To Engage or To Critique?" April 2010 Security Dialogue 41(2):169-190.DOI: 10.1177/0967010610361891

10. Laura Sjoberg. *Gender and International Security: Feminist Perspectives*. (New York: Routledge 2009)

11. Peou Sorpong. "Feminists' Critical Perspectives" in *Human Security Studies: Theories, Methods and Themes*. World Scientific. 2014 <https://www.worldscientific.com/doi>

contribution to the transformation of security discourse. It also examines the intersection of Jürgen Habermas' concept of interests with critical theory in the critical feminists' approaches to security, the applicability of the critical feminists' approach to African security challenges and recommendations.

Security, Gender, Feminism and Feminist Approaches to Security Explored

The initial definition and understanding of security refer to activities involved in protecting a country, building or person against attack, danger or damage,¹² the protection of the state and its borders by military means.¹³ Today, the effort of feminists and feminist organizations such as Women, Peace & Security (WPS), Feminist Security Studies (FSS), UN, UNDP and other international gender-conscious instruments and agencies like the, informed the distinctive transformation of the conception, discourse and scope of security and peace.

The concept of security has been broadened and relabelled 'Human security' which now refers to the protection of individuals from a wider range of threats to their well-being and security, and by a wider range of measures and policies, from the local and community levels to the national and international arenas.¹⁴ It denotes safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression, and protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily lives, whether in homes, jobs or communities.

According to the Feminist in International Relations' field known as IR Feminists it is “the diminution of all forms of violence – including domestic violence, rape, poverty, gender subordination, economic, and ecological destruction.”¹⁵ This

^{12.} *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*

^{13.} Richard Jolly, Deepayan Basu Ray. *The Human Security Framework and National Human Development Reports: A Review of Experiences and Current Debates*. UNDP May 2006. p 5

^{14.} Ibid p5

^{15.} Ann J. Tickner and Laura Sjoberg. Op cit. (2010) p 120.

broadened definition specifies and arranges the order to which what to protect must conform, that is, as first and foremost protection of human beings - male or female, then built environment and a country. Thereby expanding the scope of threat, danger, damage or harm as well as enhancing gender inclusion in security issues.

Gender is relevant to social reality¹⁶ which includes the realities of security, insecurity and peace. Gender is a social construct delineating the differences between the sexes coupled with defined societal expectations and roles. It refers to attitudes and behaviours about sex differences. It is the “culturally shared expression of sexual difference: the masculine way in which men should behave and the feminine way in which women should behave.”¹⁷ It is a social reality that every being must be conscious of and relate or engage with consciously and intentionally. Being gender aware or conscious is coming to terms with the reality that in every aspect of our existential reality there are males and females of different, ages, ethnic/racial, religious and cultural backgrounds. This comes with a spectrum of intersecting experiential realities which translates to different interconnected intersecting value laden personalities, perceptions and voices in the socio-political spaces. The beauty of these diverse voices comes out when social institutions make a potpourri of them, by creating environments of equitable access to rights and opportunities accruable to humans, for participation and expression. The establishment at an international level of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, which details the United Nations Security Council Resolution¹⁸ and other similar resolutions further confirms the importance of gender to the in-depth understanding of causes of insecurity and possible resolutions thereby promoting gender mainstreaming in security at

¹⁶. Allison Jaggar. *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. (New Jersey: Rowman & Allanfield Publishers 1983) p12

¹⁷. Simon Blackburn. *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2005) p148

¹⁸. (UNSCR) 1325 (2000)

that level.

Feminism is basically the “approach to social life, philosophy and ethics that commits itself to correcting biases leading to the subordination of women and disparagement of women's particular experiences and of the voices women bring to discussions”.¹⁹

Feminism²⁰ “is a progressive ideology that has evolved into an international movement and philosophy. Despite having diverse colourations, feminists are firmly agreed upon the essential need to replace the prevalent system of male dominance entrenched by patriarchal society. Also, the central focus is “the position of women in society and the roles they play”. Their argument is essentially that, improving the conditions of women will be beneficial to all human beings irrespective of gender”.²¹ Feminism broadly is a movement, a theory, an ideology and an interdisciplinary approach to issues of equality and equity based on gender, gender expression, gender identity, sex, and sexuality as understood through social theories and political activism.²²

African feminism is a brand of feminism that is embedded in the lived reality of women feminists in and from the African continent which is not antagonistic toward men. African feminists as cited by Akiode,

...seek to deconstruct socio-cultural constructs as well as assimilated imperialists' constructs and influence. They attempt a mainstream deconstruction of stereotypes that enhances passivity and precludes women's voices from decision-making and their efforts as complementary members of their societies from being recognized. These efforts range from their everyday contributions in the private sphere to their contributions in the public sphere, which

^{19.} Op cit. p137

^{20.} Olajumoke Akiode (2018) op cit. p 322.

^{21.} Ibid p317

^{22.} Women and Gender Studies (2013) p9

may include peace building, conflict resolution, or strategizing for war.²³

This is because African feminism "strives to create a new, liberal, productive and self-reliant African woman within the heterogeneous cultures of Africa. Feminisms in Africa, ultimately, aim at modifying culture as it affects women in different societies."²⁴

Liberalism helped provide the philosophical foundation for the theory, advocacy and practice of liberation for women in all its forms. "The aim of liberal feminism is basically advocating for the equitable application of liberal ideals to men and women, enjoyment of basic liberties for men and women, equal enjoyments of all basic human rights and emerging opportunities as social realities change."²⁵ Liberal feminists focus more on gender issues such as economic independence and equality, welfare, child care, work-place organising, health care, etc. For instance, according to Mary Wollstonecraft and J.S. Mill and as corroborated by Betty Friedman, economic independence is a prerequisite for women's full identity and freedom. Therefore, contemporary liberal feminists are focused on self-improvement for women, acquisition of skills for survival and advancement. They have achieved this through a series of 21st century compliant training for women.²⁶

Feminism in its Western origin benefitted from the liberal ideals of human dignity, autonomy, equality and individual self-fulfilment. In addition, they see male dominance as one among many forms of oppression that feed on each other in determining each individual woman's experience of oppression. They are preoccupied with analysing how male dominance works and how

^{23.} Olajumoke Akiode Op cit 2018

^{24.} Naomi Nkealah. Conceptualizing Feminism(s) in Africa: The Challenges Facing African Women Writers and Critics.(English Academy Review 2006.) pp. 133–141

^{25.} Allison Jaggar Op cit. p183

^{26.} Ibid. pp178-184

best to end it. The feminist approaches to security are essentially influenced by its liberalist origin and leaning as well as critical theory.

The feminist approach to security especially within the international relations landscape began with their active participation in the widening of the scope of the concept of security and renaming it human security. It also includes the:

“critiquing and reconstruction of key concepts of theories in international security. This also entailed pointing out the increasingly complex roles women play as security actors, and by looking at various contemporary security issues through gendered lenses. They argued that accurate, rigorous, and ethical scholarship of international security cannot be produced without taking account of women's presence in or the gendering of world politics”²⁷

The beauty of their theories and advocacies shone as they laid the foundation for contemporary questioning of gender stereotypes and bias' status quo and provided platforms to challenge the exclusion of women from all spheres of knowledge production and utilization, governance and international relations including security. Overall, the feminist approach requires supporting the voice, agency and empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity and others who face discrimination or marginalization. This led to advocacy for gender inclusion even in international relations and security councils. Their achievement fostered feminist approaches to security in theory and practice including the critical feminists; approach.

²⁷. Laura Sjoberg, op cit. 2009

Critical Theory and Critical Feminist Approach: Contributions to the Transformation of Security Discourse

Critical theory, a term coined by Max Horkheimer, denotes a distinct mode of social analysis that critiques modern culture and society. This approach, characteristic of the Frankfurt School thinkers such as Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas, combines theoretical and empirical analysis to examine the intricacies of power, ideology, and social inequality.²⁸ Rooted in the philosophical traditions of Hegel and Karl Marx, critical theory is marked by several key features which includes the following:

1. Socio-historical contextualization: Critical theory emphasizes the importance of understanding social phenomena within their specific historical and cultural contexts.
2. Emancipatory agenda: Critical theorists aim to expose and challenge dominant power structures, promoting social justice, equality, and human emancipation.
3. Reflexivity: Critical theory involves a self-reflexive approach, acknowledging the researcher's own positionality and biases within the research process.
4. Ideological critique: Critical theory involves a critical examination of dominant ideologies, highlighting their role in shaping social relations and power dynamics.²⁹

Critical theory aids a deeper understanding of the complex social issues that shape our world, highlighting how to work towards creating a more just and equitable society.

The theory sees social and cultural imperfections as defects of rationality and compares them with an ideal to which the

²⁸. Vincent B. Leitch. *The Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism* 2nd Edition. (New York: W.W. Norton Company 2010.)p1108

²⁹. Oxford Reference, *Critical Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2024) <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095648578>. Retrieved 18 February, 2024

progress of reason, embodied in pure and undistorting social arrangements would ideally tend. Critical theory works dialectically by searching out contradictions in social arrangements in which, for example, certain groups are systematically excluded from power or from the free access to information that structures rational debate.³⁰

Critical theorists do not merely critique and attempt to change society as a whole, they search for the underlying assumptions in social life that keep people from fully and truly understanding how the world works.

Habermas a leading contemporary representative of the Frankfurt School is also believed to have contributed to the emergence of the critical sciences and by implication critical theory by his proposal of the three cognitive interests. The third cognitive interest-'the interest in removing distortions in our understanding of ourselves', is said to be the most relevant in influencing critical theory.³¹

Feminism has different brands which are defined by their ideological underpinnings and focus. There are the liberal feminists whose ideology is characterized by liberalist ideals, Marxist feminists whose ideological underpinning is Marxism/Marxist ideals. In this light, Critical feminism is underpinned by critical theory, their approach is influenced by and produced by the ideals of critical theory. The feminists with this perspective and who belong to this discipline, who use critical theory within security discourse are referred to as Critical feminists among whom are Nancy Fraser, Iris Young, Amy Allen, Seyla Benhabib, Laura Sjoberg and a host of others. Their approach therefore is to review and discard where necessary the narrow focus of mainstream approaches to security. This they have

³⁰. Simon Blackburn op cit. pp 84

³¹. Oxford Reference op cit.

done and are still doing by redefining security and its scope alongside dynamics of intersections.

Critical feminist theories focus on issues of power and seek to explain the origins and consequences of gender relations, particularly those that are beneficial to men. They study the ways that assumptions and ideology around gender are produced, reproduced, resisted and changed in and through the everyday experiences of men and women.

In the sphere of security, especially international security, critical feminist scholarship has increasingly shifted the definitional parameters of security and insecurity beyond formal declarations of war and peace to include lived 'everyday' experiences and their intersectional dynamics.³² That is, for critical feminists, security and insecurity transcend the formal and common parameters used to characterize the ideas or concepts of war and peace, as well as the strategies delineated for its prevention and resolution. It has been expanded to include the lived experiences of the people male, female, young, old, sick and vulnerable and their intersectional dynamics during peace or war.

This approach began with correct definition and understanding of what security means and entails. As earlier mentioned, human beings became the first focus of the activities of security. That is, the order of what to protect is rearranged as 'protecting human beings, male or female in the society, building, built environment, the country, region etc.' This new order laid the foundation for further broadening of the focus of security, insecurity and peace. While mainstream approaches to security focus more on internal and territorial protection within the scope of international relations, critical feminists argued for prioritizing human beings' safety and wellbeing within the states above interstate, regional and international persons and above structures, built areas within and outside the state or country. This led to detailed consideration

³². Gender & Security. "Feminist Approach" - *Innovation and effectiveness guidance Note*. https://www.international.gc.ca/fiap_ie-paief_ie 11 Sept 2019. Retrieved February, 2022

of threats to human beings, the common every day, male and female. This brought to the fore the prevalent issue of violence, gender-based violence, domestic violence, rape, forced prostitution, modern forced slavery and so on which were hitherto not considered under security issues. The approach to security thereafter focused on the elimination of harm- mental, physical and emotional etc. This critical approach aligns well with the conception of gendered security, which is the inclusion of women's voices, concerns and needs in the security praxis.³³ These efforts culminated into the transformation of security discourse and praxis both at the local and international sphere and provided a foundation for the emergence of the idea of gendered security.

Achievements of Critical Feminists' Approaches to Security

The success of the exploit of the critical feminists in the security landscape cannot be overemphasized, a few of them are highlighted as follows:

Through their gendered perspective of security, they were able to focus more on individuals in the conceptualization of security, by “considering the dilemma and role of women in the study of security, insecurity, conflict and peace. They introduced the human security paradigm that lay emphasis on human emancipation and used the language of human security to advance the goal of female emancipation”³⁴ That is instead of the commonly used word security, they introduced the prefix 'human' and broadened the idea to focus consciously on human beings in the security discourse.

These critical feminists redefined the concept and scope of human security to highlight the importance of gender conscious human security which is significantly distinguished from the

³³. Marsha Henry. 'Gender, security and development', *Conflict, Security and Development*, 7(1), (New York: Routledge. 2007)pp. 61-84

³⁴. Christie Ryerson. “Critical Voices and Human Security: To Endure, To Engage or To Critique?” April 2010 *Security Dialogue* 41(2):169-190.DOI: 10.1177/0967010610361891

Statist concept of national security. (By Statist we mean a State or government of a nation). That is, the Statist concept of security often times do not prioritize women and the vulnerable groups in their planning for and enforcement of strategies geared towards national security. For instance, the recent world-wide lockdown as a global security strategy to mitigate the COVID-19 Pandemic is an apt example of a Statist form of security measure. There was no intentional analysis of how the forced restriction of movement and the stay at home order would impact men, women, girls, the elderly, and the poor people who live in crowded slums differently. There were credible reports on how the lockdown created an unintended environment of risk and insecurity for women and young girls who by going to work and school daily (before the pandemic and subsequent lockdown) were shielded from their (existing and potential) abusers and unwanted pregnancies; how women were overwhelmed with the increased care burden for the family which could have been shared by crèches, nannies, kindergarten schools, home for the elderly and so on. Women who were making their livelihoods outside of their homes lost their finance as they could no longer engage in the medium, small and micro (MSME) businesses that empowered and gave them financial independence, or the poor in crowded houses who were forced to remain in an overpopulated environment prone to the spread of the disease itself besides the disposition of such places to conflict, violence and depression.

United Nations predicted that COVID-19 pandemic could have huge knock-on effects on women's health as they constitute the majority of health and social care workers, who are on the front lines of the fight against Covid-19. This also includes impact on maternal health care, pressure from increased domestic responsibility, exposure to increased risk of domestic/gender-

based violence and loss of their livelihoods.³⁵

Globally, domestic violence rates rise during lockdown periods. “Stress, alcohol consumption, and financial difficulties are all considered triggers for violence in the home, and the quarantine measures being imposed around the world will increase all three. Social distancing and self-isolation are often tools of coercive and controlling behaviour by perpetrators, which also shuts down routes to safety and support.”³⁶ These forecasts about the unequal burden of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the global lockdown became realized during the Statist national security policy of global lockdown.³⁷

The critical feminists approaches were committed to “making the invisible visible, bringing women's lives to the centre, rendering the trivial important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, and understanding women as subjects rather than objects of men.”³⁸ They successfully normalized the inclusion of security of women and gender security in discourses on human security.

In addition, they have consistently laid emphasis on gender-based violence as a threat not only to international and national security but, more importantly, to human security, and especially to the security of women beyond the established Liberalist gender framework, thereby expanding the scope of liberal feminist

³⁵. UN, 2020. “The Impact of COVID-19 on Women”. *UN Policy Health Brief*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digitallibrary/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women#vi>

³⁶. Helen Lewis. “The Coronavirus Is a Disaster for Feminism: Pandemics Affect Men and Women Differently”. *The Atlantic*, March 19, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/feminism-womens-rights-coronavirus-covid19/608302/> Retrieved 10.04.202

³⁷. Olajumoke Akiode. “Gender Rights and Relevant Aids in Pandemics: A Philosophical Analysis” in *PHILOSOPHIA POLITICA, Journal of African Political Philosophy and Leadership. Vol 1*. ISSN 2026-6553. A Philosophy and COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria Special Edition, December, 2020. Pp77-79

³⁸. Peou Sorpong. 2014 op cit.

discourse. In jettisoning the narrow focus of mainstream approaches to security as well as going beyond the clamour for political and economic equality, critical feminists have ensured that gender-based violence is as much a security issue as a declaration of war or peace. Violence against women (VAW) as defined by UN, is “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”³⁹ This broad definition includes, but is not limited to, violence occurring in the family, intimate partners' violence, violence within the general community, trafficking and forced prostitution, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state. They have insisted that Violence against women VAW and or GBV (Gender based violence) fall within the security purview as they are human security issues and concerns.

These critical feminists also criticised war discourses that ignore the inter-relationship between domestic, national, and international violence. They argue that realistic appraisal of the impact and consequences of war through empathic understanding will highlight the short and long-term consequences of warfare on real men and women, children and elderly people in the society.⁴⁰ They also emphasized the linkages between domestic, national, and international violence, thereby ensuring that the inclusion of the interconnectedness of violence from the domestic level to international level aids the effective planning and implementation of security measures and strategies.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that there are no perfect ideas and approaches, critical feminist security studies and approaches are not without actual and perceived flaws as well as criticisms they have and are responding to. Two main form of criticisms levelled against critical feminist approach include

³⁹. UN Article 1. “UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women”. Proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993.

⁴⁰. Olajumoke Akiode. 2019 op cit. 216

firstly, their expansion of the concept of security, championed by those who deny any possible good in the addition of the human prefix to the concept of security. Their arguments are that it is tantamount to merely renaming many problems that have already been recognized in other contexts and that already have perfectly good names and so nothing is to be gained by combining them under a new labels; that it robs security of any definite parameters, as anything and everything could now be considered a risk to security and that it risks raising hope beyond the capabilities of decision makers nationally and internationally.⁴¹ Secondly, their initial erroneous perception of women as only non-violent peace makers in conflict situations. Christine Sylvester argues that “while feminism has historically been linked to peace and nonviolence, new feminist International Relations (IR) scholarship has shown that women also engage in political violence.”⁴² That is, advancement in feminist security research has challenged the notion of linking women solely with peace and non-violence as this is not the whole story.”⁴³ As earlier discussed, women engage in peaceful resolution of disagreements before it degenerates into conflict, they are engaged in conflict resolution but they are also war protagonists, conflict initiators and aggressors.

It can be conclusively argued that tremendous progress has been made through the critical feminists' approach to security starting from their demand for inclusion of women, by always asking the question -where are women in security theory, policies & practices? Up to securing roles for women and putting gender in the centre of security theories, policies and practices. As it is required of the feminist approach, they have in varying degrees of

⁴¹. Mohammed Ayoob. 'Defining Security: A Subaltern Realist Perspective'. In K. Krause and M. C. Williams, eds., *Critical Security Studies: Cases and Concepts*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1997) pp 125-7

⁴². ICTY. *International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia*. (<https://www.icty.org/> 1993)

⁴³. Christine Sylvester. “Tensions in Feminist Security Studies.” *Security Dialogue* 41.6 (2010): 607–614. DOI: 10.1177/0967010610388206

success supported the voices, agency and empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity and others who face discrimination, marginalization and even threats of violence because they are women.

Assessment of the Intersection of Jürgen Habermas' Concept of Interests and Critical Theory in Critical Feminists' Approaches.

Within the admirably woven tapestry of critical theory from inception till contemporary times, lies some conspicuously bold shades of colour that boosted its appeal, which resonated with the liberal feminists and enhanced its adoption as an emancipatory and inclusionist tool for their agenda. This appraisal is to determine how well the critical feminists' approach blended Habermas' concept of interest with other concepts underpinning critical theory using the phenomenological method which interrogates lived experiences devoid of assumptions.

The standpoints of critical theory described simply as a reflection and a working towards an ideal, evolved from Hegel and Karl Marx's idea.⁴⁴ Karl Marx argued that if the proletariat could reflect upon their condition and different forms of alienation, which they were condemned to, they would criticize and reject it and eagerly work towards an ideal society through revolution. This influenced the critical feminists (liberal feminists who adopted critical theory ideals) in their reflections on and criticism of social construction, perception of women's role and place within the different aspects in the society including the discourse, theorizing and policies about security issues. It also motivated them into working to change what was not to their interests, including narratives of exclusion with the goal of achieving an ideal narrative and societal structure that aligned with their goals. This reflection and working towards an ideal incorporated Habermas Jürgen's⁴⁵ proposed three cognitive interests common to human

⁴⁴. Simon Blackburn. 2005 op cit. p84

⁴⁵. Jurgen Habermas. *Knowledge and Human Interests*. (Boston: Polity Press.1987) ISBN 0-7456-0459-5. Pp 3-4, 23-40

beings. They are as follows:

The first interest is the technical interest in knowing and controlling the world around us;

The second interest is the interest in being able to understand each other and join in common activity and;

The third interest is the interest in removing distortions in our understanding of ourselves

The focus of this discourse is more on the second and third interests.

The import of these interests in achieving the ideal in security praxis is such that, it begins with following Socrates's admonition to society, 'Man know thyself'. Knowing that globally we are faced with multifaceted security challenges that are not boundary compliant but mutable and interconnected with all in the global village the world has become, is the beginning of solving the problem. Knowing your capacity, available resources, your strengths and limitations goes a long way in fostering the control we aspire for. The second interests is about understanding one another beyond socially constructed narratives beclouding our existential reality. It plays out when individuals, citizens, policy makers and international peace stakeholders intentionally endeavour to understand one another's interests, concerns and needs. This removes gender blind spots and applies gender lens in the understanding of society. This gendered understanding enables collaborations in activities especially those that foster the actualization of those interests, needs and concerns, thereby jointly achieving interests which enhances peace and security. The third interest, which is the interest in removing distortions in 'our understanding of ourselves' comes after insights and deep understanding about one another has been gained and improved upon through collaborative activities.

These types of interests played significant role in critical theory as well as the critical feminist theory and its application in human security. Feminists have been preoccupied with identifying, naming and removal of distortion to women's

understanding of themselves and one another as well as removing entrenched and emerging distortions in society's understanding of them. And in the security landscape, they have by the expansion of the scope of the concept of security, been understanding and removing distortions to that understanding in order to ensure a complete and true understanding of how the world works in relations to human security.

The critical feminist approaches to security besides being shaped by the underpinning ideas of critical theory is prevention focused and reflexive approach. While it is geared towards generating alternative strategies to mitigate insecurity as preventive strategies, it also constantly reflects on its own achievements to ensure its continued relevance and fulfilment of its agenda. It was in being reflexive that they realized that women are not always victims but could also be war protagonists and thus improving their matrix of stakeholders in peace and conflict resolution. Reflexibility makes their approach relevant and gives it wider applicability.

Its Applicability to Contemporary African Security Challenges

It is already an established fact that the understanding and experience of war, conflict, and all forms of insecurity differ significantly for men and women. Therefore, in the prevention of insecurity, both men and women are needed and required to work together as well as in responding to insecurity and in post-conflict resolution and rehabilitation efforts. In contemporary African countries where the spectrum of risks to human security is a complex array ranging from global political economics, culture, and regional/local dynamics (which includes regional conflicts, State fragility, weak institutions, and hydra-headed corruption); insecurities caused by kidnapping, terrorist, bandits, killer herdsmen attacks as well as threats from the private sphere, that is, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, gender-based violence. Even other human security challenges that are less talked

about such as road and highway insecurities caused by containers falling off trailers/trucks and crushing motorists and pedestrians, faulty petrol tankers that lose control and crash or explode in traffic causing fire outbreak, and reckless motorcycle, tricycle, bus (danfo) and taxi riders all of which cause harm, and endanger lives of men, women, children, elderly and vulnerable people, critical feminists' approaches become relevant. Through their approach, security becomes reconstructed on the basis of women's experiences of violence, interrelating violence on the local, national, and international levels, and eradicating structural violence instead of primarily focussing on the direct violence of war.”⁴⁶ Their gendered approach thus disaggregates the cultural, social, economic and political mechanisms for the distribution of power and control, and recognizes who is affected and how, and what specific forms of protection or assistance are needed by whom.⁴⁷ They are able to generate policies that are at once sensitive to the insecurities of vulnerable women and integrate these concerns into a wider narrative of human threats.

While there are laws upholding the rights of men and women to be protected from harm and violence, there are crippling gaps in their implementation across board. For instance, some African countries have made substantial progress in both constitutional provision and implementation of protection against Violence against Women (VAW), Gender based Violence (GBV) and harm during conflict, as well as other threats to human security aforementioned, most others like Nigeria are still struggling to get all its subnational entities to domesticate these laws so as to be on the same page as a nation. The Critical feminists' approach requires collaborations with and among African feminists including those who are not yet critical feminists to rise to the occasion by calling for policy reviews and effective

⁴⁶. Gunhild Hoogensen and Svein Vigeland Rottem. 'Gender Identity and the Subject of Security'. *Security Dialogue*, 35(2), June. (Sage Publications. 2004.). p. 167

⁴⁷. United Nations. *Women, Peace and Security*. 2002. [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/eWPS.pdf].

implementation of laws that mitigates these avoidable threats to human security.

Collaboration horizontally and vertically among these feminists, with policy makers, local women at the grassroots, community based organizations and families especially in conflict –prone areas is essential. The security architecture in public spaces needs to be reviewed to be proactive in preventing attack and harm of all forms in public places. For instance, in the light of the kidnapping events that occur in high schools, in order to keep the staff and students especially the girl child safe from mass abduction, there should be efficient security architecture for all schools especially those in conflict and kidnapping prone areas, and where there are existing security networks, they must be upgraded and regularly tested and reviewed to ensure they are capable of real-time protection of their spaces. They all should be well equipped with human and technological security resources, toll free life-lines available with very sophisticated and high-powered 24hrs security assistance within reasonable reach of the schools. Safe places should be situated near schools and other public spaces to enhance easy escape from attack and abductors.

There is a Yoruba African proverb about security that goes thus:

“Bi iku ile o pani, ti ode ko le pani” - Literal meaning: If there is no enemy within, the enemy without cannot successfully attack/kill. If there is no internal security breach, external threat to security cannot succeed. That is, there are always insider support, personal security breaches through careless exposures, collaborations, invitation and informants for any attack on a person and public spaces to be successfully carried out.

The import of this is to challenge the critical feminist's discourse on human security, as its focus is mostly on external danger to the men and women, young and old, the built and non-built environment and the country. Security breaches and risk of insecurity could have personal and internal origins, are there security infrastructure, policies and programs equipped to

successfully mitigate and eliminate these types of risk? Do the critical feminist approaches have developed sensitivities and consciousness to comprehend and objectively question such realities and address them? There is therefore need for the critical feminist approach to not rest on its successes but continue in its reflexivity to anticipate other dimensions of insecurity including those of internal origins; to engage in systemic thinking and strategies to identify insecurity enablers within households and families, in public places that enhance and support the successful endangering, attack, kidnap, abduction harming of men and women.

Lastly, the end-point of critical feminists' aspiration especially in security discourse, scholarship and praxis is the emergence and adoption of 'gendered security' as this is underpinned by its quest for 'working toward an ideal' in achieving an effective and sustainable approach to human security. Through Gender, security becomes reconstructed on the basis of women's experiences of violence, interrelating violence on the local, national, and international levels, and eradicating structural violence instead of primarily focussing on the direct violence of war.⁴⁸ Gendered security essentially considers the plights, the risks that men and women are exposed to in a dis-aggregated manner and how men and women can be protected in a way that will be commensurate to their needs and concerns against attacks, damage or any form of violence. It prioritizes human beings by initiating cascades of activities in ensuring protection for men and women first against attack, damage and any form of violence (mental, emotional, financial, physical, verbal, domestic etc.) as well as, built environment and the country. This means that gendered security entails a violence and victim database or matrix that properly identifies security concerns, and needs of both male and female, dis-aggregated calculation of proportion of exposure to violence,

⁴⁸. Gunhild Hoogensen and Svein Vigeland Rottem. 'Gender Identity and the Subject of Security'. *Security Dialogue*, 35(2), June. (Sage Publications. 2004.)

as well as analysis of commensurate prevention, mitigation and protection strategies. There is a huge gap in existing human security architecture that the gendered security adoption, implementation and mainstreaming could bridge.

Conclusion

Safe and healthy men and women are essential for a productive society. Similarly, a secure African continent is vital for the wellbeing of its people and sustainable development. Achieving this requires collaborative efforts, proactive security measures, effective responses, and efficient rehabilitation strategies to mitigate security challenges and foster a safer Africa. To this end, the aim of this paper is to critically examine the intersection of critical feminist theory and security studies, exploring its potential to address pressing security challenges in Africa.

To achieve its aim, this paper contextualized security challenges in Africa and the feminist studies and interventions aimed at addressing the security challenges. It also theorized the tenets and approaches of critical feminists and the philosophical underpinnings of critical theory especially Herbasmas' concepts of interest, feminism as well as phenomenology as they informed and supported the claims, the analysis, conclusions, and recommendations made in the paper. It also situated critical feminist security studies within the African landscape, examined its successes, challenges and applicability to address security challenges in Africa. The Critical feminists in their approaches made remarkable progress in the security landscape in terms of the expansion of its scope, the arrangement of its priority and the reflections on social realities, the removal of distorted perception of security narratives and working towards the ideal. Its applicability to societies in Africa is not in doubt as it has enriched the collaborations around security infrastructure and resources. It has also created awareness about the need for security matrix and gendered security praxis. While critical feminists' approaches are not without their limitations, the paper made recommendations

about the need for increased collaborations with policy makers to co-create more preventive strategies and in-depth assessment of insecurity causal factor(s). It also calls for critical review of women's present and emerging role in violence, conflict and insecurity as well as in conflict resolution and in forming strategic collaborations to ensure sustainable success in charting security frameworks that works. In conclusion, this paper asserts that critical feminist approaches to security offer a nuanced understanding of Africa's security challenges and inform effective solutions. A key solution lies in adopting gendered human security strategies, which foster collaborative and systemic approaches to critical feminist praxis. This framework promises to significantly enhance sustainable human security strategies and promote peaceful development in Africa.

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