

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF WESTERN SECURITY THEORY AND THE COLONIAL FOUNDATIONS OF INSECURITY

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Abstract

The dominant security paradigms in international relations—realism, liberalism, and constructivism, were forged in the crucible of European and American history, yet they presume conditions that Africa does not share. This failure has had tangible consequences: decades of liberal peacebuilding interventions have failed to produce sustainable peace, while the "failed state" narrative has obscured the ongoing harms of colonial extraction. This article offers a phenomenological critique of these Western security theories, arguing that they fail to account for the lived reality of insecurity in Africa. Methodologically, this article employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach comprising three interconnected components: (1) phenomenological analysis, which centres the subjective, lived experience of insecurity; (2) decolonial critique, which challenges the epistemic violence of Western knowledge systems and centres African epistemologies; and (3) illustrative case study analysis of Sudan/South Sudan, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mali—selected for their diverse regions (East, West, Central, and Sahelian Africa), distinct colonial histories (British, French, and Belgian), and varying configurations of identity-based conflict and external intervention. The analysis draws on African philosophy (Ramose, Gyekye, Menkiti), decolonial scholarship (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Fredua-Mensah), and critical security studies (Mbembe, Bayart, Kalu). The article demonstrates that the colonial foundations of the African state, arbitrary borders, extractive institutions, and violent governance—are not historical relics but active structures that continue to shape African insecurity. Through concrete examples from the four case studies, it illustrates how the "failed state" narrative functions as a neo-colonial discourse that perpetuates rather than resolves insecurity. The article argues that a phenomenological approach, rooted in lived experience and indigenous wisdom, offers a more effective framework for understanding and addressing Africa's security challenges. It further demonstrates that Ubuntu provides a relational ontology of security that challenges the individualistic assumptions of Western theory. The article concludes by proposing a decolonized African security philosophy grounded in Ubuntu and the politics of recognition as an alternative to Western-imposed security models, with concrete implications for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners.

Keywords: phenomenology, African security, colonialism, Ubuntu, failed state, decoloniality, lived experience, case study analysis, qualitative methodology

Introduction

"Would western defined security be an African security and would this reproduce, or develop, from indigenous African ontologies, so that African understanding of security and violence could actually bestow to the global peacekeeping actions?" This question, posed by scholar Diana Sfetlana Stoica, challenges the universality of Western security concepts and invites a reflection on the evolution of security and violence in African scholarship. The question echoes the disruptive realities of imagining security and defining violence in a manner that transcends Western thinking, affirming new debates and narratives of African philosophy recognition, African self-recognition, and sustainable African development. The dominant security paradigms in international relations, realism, liberalism, and constructivism were forged in the crucible of European and American history. They presume certain conditions that Africa does not share. Applying them to Africa, as one scholar observes, is like "using a map of London to navigate Lagos: the landmarks are wrong." This failure has had tangible consequences: decades of liberal peacebuilding interventions have failed to produce sustainable peace, while the "failed state" narrative has served to obscure the ongoing harms of colonial extraction. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan (2005) institutionalized the very divisions it claimed to overcome, and by 2025, both Sudan and South Sudan had reached "a state of terminal collapse." In the Sahel, French counterterrorism operations gave way to Russian mercenary violence, while the Bellah people of Mali continue to endure systemic discrimination in a climate of near-total impunity. This article offers a phenomenological critique of these Western security theories, arguing that they fail to account for the lived reality of insecurity in Africa. It demonstrates that the colonial foundations of the African state; arbitrary borders, extractive institutions, and violent governance are not historical relics but active structures that continue to shape African insecurity. The article selects four case studies: Sudan/South Sudan, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mali to illustrate the devastating consequences of colonial identity construction and external manipulation. These cases were chosen because they represent diverse regions (East, West, Central, and Sahelian Africa), different colonial histories (British, French, and Belgian), and varying configurations of identity-based conflict and external intervention.

The argument is grounded in the recognition that security and violence are "floating terms, their understanding in an African taxonomy should be Africanized" (Stoica 2023, p. 104). As Stoica's analysis reveals, "security includes violence as inner boosting element, that allows for the two to be in a strange relationship, recalling for attentive consideration and critics on the application of Western inspired peacekeeping actions that do not take into account specific conditions such as territory and culture" (Stoica 2023, p. 106). Drawing on decolonial thought and African philosophy, this article argues that a phenomenological approach, rooted in lived experience and indigenous wisdom, offers a more effective framework for understanding and addressing Africa's security challenges. It proposes a decolonized African security philosophy grounded in Ubuntu and the politics of

recognition as an alternative to Western-imposed security models.

A Phenomenological Critique of Western Security Theory

The Limitations of Realism

Realism, in its classical form, assumes that states are rational actors pursuing their interests in an anarchic international system. Security, for the realist, is about power, accumulating it, balancing it, projecting it (Morgenthau 1948, p. 13). As Morgenthau (1948, p. 13) famously argued, "International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim." But what happens when the state itself is weak, illegitimate, or captured by elites? What happens when the state is the primary source of insecurity for its own citizens? Realism has no answer because it presumes the state is the solution, not the problem. The postcolonial African state, however, is not the rational, unified actor that realism presupposes. As Bayart (1993) demonstrates in *The State in Africa*, the African state is better understood as a "rhizome" of networks, patronage, and extraction, not a coherent bureaucracy pursuing national interest. The state, in Bayart's analysis, is a site of "the politics of the belly," a system in which political power is used for personal enrichment and the consolidation of elite networks. Bayart (1993, p. 78) argues that "the state in Africa is not a public good; it is a private asset. It is a source of wealth to be exploited, not a public institution to be served."

The case of Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) exemplifies this predatory state logic. Mobutu's 32-year rule, which his office once described as "a regime of the governed, by the governed, for the governed" was in reality a system of systematic state capture. In 1989, the United States government estimated Mobutu's personal wealth at **\$5 billion**, an amount that was "equivalent to Zaire's entire national debt at the time" (Meredith 2005, p. 235). By 1996, despite its vast mineral wealth, Zaire's per capita income had dropped almost two-thirds since independence and was listed as the lowest of all 174 countries in the Human Development Report (UNDP 1996). The state had become, in Bayart's terms, a site of extraction, not development.

Moreover, as Fredua-Mensah (2016, p. 72) argues, the core concepts of mainstream IR theories "are raced: They are rooted in discourses that centre and favour Europe and the West." This racialized foundation limits the field's ability to address important questions about international security and organization, particularly those concerning Africa and the Global South. The critique of "intellectual gatekeeping" in the field of International Relations through mechanisms of "exclusion as punishment, representation and positionality, standardization, coloniality, and silencing", highlights how African perspectives have been systematically marginalized (Fredua-Mensah 2016, p. 73).

The Hollow Institutions of Liberalism

Liberalism, for its part, assumes that democracy, free markets, and international

institutions can produce peace. The "democratic peace theory" holds that democracies do not fight each other (Doyle 1983). Yet many of Africa's most violent conflicts occur in states that are nominally democratic. Liberal peacebuilding, elections, good governance programs, rule of law reform, has been tried for decades with dismal results. The reason is that liberalism imports institutional forms without attending to cultural content. It assumes that ballot boxes and constitutions are sufficient, ignoring the deep histories of inequality, exclusion, and trauma that make formal institutions hollow. As Paris (2004, p. 179) critiques, "The problem with the liberal peace is not that it is too liberal, but that it is too thin. It focuses on the mechanics of elections and markets without attending to the deeper social and cultural conditions that make democracy and markets work."

The case of Sudan and South Sudan illustrates this failure dramatically. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 was a liberal peacebuilding project that institutionalized the very divisions it claimed to overcome. The "Joint Integrated Units" (JIUs) were "largely symbolic, underfunded, and never truly integrated," ensuring that "the ultimate arbiter of any political dispute would remain a military force, not a negotiation" (Kalu 2024, p. 239). The CPA's political mechanisms for building trust and a shared identity were "systematically undermined or ignored," and the agreement "deferred the most contentious issues" (Kalu 2024, p. 240). By 2025, both Sudan and South Sudan had reached "a state of terminal collapse" (Kalu 2024, p. 241).

The aftermath of South Sudan's independence in 2011 further illustrates the failure of liberal peace-building. By December 2013, the country had descended into civil war, with fighting between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and those aligned with former Vice President Riek Machar. The conflict killed hundreds of thousands and displaced millions. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan documented "widespread attacks against civilians, including rape, sexual violence, and extrajudicial killings" (UN Human Rights Council 2017, para. 23). The liberal peacebuilding project had failed to address the underlying governance deficits and elite rivalries that made such violence possible.

Constructivism and the Colonial Construction of Identity

Constructivism which emphasizes ideas, identities, and norms do come closer to the African reality. It recognizes that security is not just material but social. It asks how identities are formed and how norms shape behavior. Wendt (1992, p. 398) argued that "identities are the basis of interests. Without identities, interests have no meaning." Yet constructivism, as practiced in Western academies, has largely ignored the colonial construction of African identities. It treats identity as a variable to be studied rather than a wound to be healed. The identities of postcolonial Africans were forged in the crucible of colonial violence, arbitrary borders, and imposed ethnic categories. Treating these identities as simply "constructed" without attending to the violence of their construction is

to miss the fundamental issue. Berman (1998, p. 305) demonstrates that "modern African ethnicity is a social construction of the colonial period through the reaction of precolonial societies to the forces of colonialism." He shows how the "unique linkage between bureaucratic authoritarianism, patronage and ethnic fragmentation emerged" under colonialism and has shaped "State-society relations in Africa and the 'politics of the belly'" (Berman 1998, p. 306). The colonial strategy of "divide and rule" was not merely an administrative convenience but a deliberate policy of control that created and perpetuated ethnic divisions.

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 offers a harrowing illustration of the violence inherent in colonial identity construction. Belgian colonial administrators had imposed identity cards that classified Rwandans as Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa, freezing fluid social identities into rigid ethnic categories (Mamdani 2001). Mamdani (2001, p. 34) argues that "the colonial construction of ethnic identity was not a recognition of pre-existing divisions but a creation of new ones. The Hutu and Tutsi were not separate tribes; they were constructed as such by Belgian colonial administrators who found it useful to divide and rule." When the genocide occurred in 1994, it was the culmination of decades of colonial identity politics that had been manipulated by postcolonial elites for political gain.

The Shared Flaw: The State as Given

All three theories share a deeper flaw: they assume the state is a given. They presume territorial integrity, administrative capacity, popular legitimacy, and a monopoly on legitimate violence. These are not features of most African states. African states are, in the words of Achille Mbembe, "postcolonial" entities born not from indigenous political evolution but from the violent imposition of European rule. Mbembe (2001, p. 102) writes: "The postcolony is characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and a lack of proportion, and by a distinct way of embodying and exercising power." The creation of African states at the Berlin Conference (1884–1885) produced "factories for extracting resources for external interests" (Kalu 2024, p. 234). Unlike European states that emerged from "domestic contestations for power, authority and control," African states were externally created "without internal reform and restructuring at independence" and "remain outward-facing and continue to carry out the functions for which they were created by external non-African actors" (Kalu 2024, p. 235). This extractive function explains why African states "lack capacities for roles as vectors of development because they were largely conceived as externally autonomous structures and agents of society" (Kalu 2024, p. 236).

The Colonial Foundations of Insecurity

Colonial Borders and the Scramble for Africa

The borders drawn in Berlin are perhaps the most enduring legacy of the Scramble. They remain, with few alterations, the borders of modern African states. These borders have no basis in African reality. They do not respect ethnic homelands, linguistic communities, or

historical kingdoms. They are entirely arbitrary, the product of European horse-trading, not African self-determination.

Obikaeze, Osah, and Adebolu-Ololade (2025, p. 1) observe that "The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 which seemingly settled the scramble for Africa by European powers created opportunities for arbitrary creation of artificial states in Africa. The artificial demarcation of territories resulted to separation of people who were originally meant to live as a nation, and unification of peoples who originally had no form of common history, culture, language and values." This cartographic violence did not simply divide territory; it created identities that became instruments of control and power.

Houle and Conroy-Krutz (2025, p. 2) demonstrate that colonial boundaries divided **at least** 177 ethnic groups across Africa, fundamentally altering identity structures and weakening traditional institutions. This division had significant ramifications for the strength of ethnic identities and the capacity of traditional authorities to maintain social cohesion. The Yorùbá, for instance, were divided between French Dahomey and the British Southern Nigeria Protectorate. The Ewe were split between the Gold Coast and Togoland. The Bakongo were separated between Belgian Congo and Portuguese Angola. As Englebert, Tarango, and Carter (2002, p. 1095) estimate, on average, 40 percent of an African country's population comes from partitioned groups, with cross-country variation ranging from 80 percent to much lower figures.

The conflict between Sudan and South Sudan illustrates the devastating consequences of arbitrary colonial borders. The Anglo-Egyptian condominium administered Sudan "not as a single entity but as two distinct territories," with the northern provinces governed as being "more akin to Arabic-speaking Egypt" while the southern provinces were treated as "separate and more aligned with other East African colonies" (Kalu 2024, p. 238). This policy of "divide and rule" was explicit: "trade between the two regions was discouraged, Arabic language and names were prohibited in the south, and Christian missionaries were encouraged in the south while Muslim proselytizing was banned" (Kalu 2024, p. 238). The result was "the creation of profound and deliberate inequalities in education, economic development, and political experience, fostering deep mistrust between a Northern population that viewed the South as 'backwards' and a Southern population that harbored memories of 19th-century enslavement by Northerners" (Kalu 2024, p. 239).

The consequences of this colonial legacy proved catastrophic. When Sudan gained independence in 1956, power was "exclusively transferred to northern elites." Of "eight hundred senior administrative posts vacated by the British, a mere six were given to southerners" (Kalu 2024, p. 240). This political and economic marginalisation was "the immediate trigger for violence." In 1955, "months before formal independence, the Southern Corps of the Army mutinied, igniting the First Sudanese Civil War (1955–1972)," which "claimed up to a million lives" (Kalu 2024, p. 240). The pattern repeated in 1983,

when President Nimeiry's decision to "abrogate the south's autonomy and impose Islamic Sharia law nationwide" ignited the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005), which resulted in "the deaths of two million people" (Kalu 2024, p. 241).

The Extractive Colonial State

The colonial state was designed to extract resources. Its infrastructure, ports, railways, roads, was built to move resources from the interior to the coast. Its legal system was designed to protect the property rights of colonial companies, not the rights of Africans. Its administrative system was designed to control populations, not to serve them. The colonial state was not a developmental state; it was a predatory state. It took resources and gave nothing in return. It destroyed African institutions. It undermined African economies. It left behind a legacy of weakness, dependency, and extraction. As Kalu (2024, p. 235) argues, the externally created postcolonial states "retained their colonial structure and the purposes for which Europeans created these states." Consequently, "external interests will not finance Africa's development to become their competitor." Rodney (1972, p. 45) articulated this logic powerfully in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, arguing that "colonialism did not develop Africa; it underdeveloped Africa. It extracted its resources, destroyed its industries, and left it dependent on the export of raw materials. This legacy persists in the postcolonial economy." The contemporary resource curse, the paradox of poverty amid plenty, is a direct consequence of this extractive legacy. Nigeria, for example, has earned over \$1 trillion in oil revenues since independence in 1960, yet the poverty rate has increased from 15 percent in 1960 to over 40 percent today (World Bank 2021, p. 45). This paradox is not accidental; it is the result of institutional structures designed for extraction rather than development.

The Violent Colonial State

The colonial state was also violent. It maintained control through force. It suppressed dissent with brutality. It created security forces that were accountable to colonial authorities, not to the population. This violence was not an aberration; it was the foundation of colonial rule. The colonial state was a necropolitical state, a state that exercised sovereignty through the production of death. As Mbembe (2003, p. 11) argues, the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides in "the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die." The legacy of this violence persists in the postcolonial state. Police brutality is endemic. Security forces kill with impunity. The line between state and militia is blurred. The experience of military personnel implementing Nigeria's Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) programme illustrates how this legacy of violence continues to shape security actors. A study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) found that frontline soldiers, many of whom were "previously engaged in direct combat with Boko Haram," are now "tasked with facilitating the reintegration of those same adversaries" (Atom 2025, p. 45). These personnel express "deep uncertainty and a cautious optimism towards the programme." The study introduced a "betrayal–redemption framework to capture the psychosocial experiences of these frontline implementers," revealing "narratives of betrayal, by government institutions, colleagues, and communities" that

reveal "the depth of institutional neglect, mistrust, and scepticism about ex-combatants' repentance" (Atom 2025, p. 47).

The "Failed State" Narrative as Neo-Colonial Discourse

The "failed state" label obscures the colonial creation of the African state. The state was designed to fail, not in the sense that colonial powers intended its failure, but in the sense that its design was fundamentally incompatible with African flourishing. A state built on violence, extraction, and denial of citizenship cannot become stable, just, and prosperous simply by changing leaders or holding elections. As Kalu (2024, p. 245) argues, "the current governance structures in both the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan have not merely failed but have become the primary drivers of human suffering and regional instability." The crises from 2013 to 2025 in both countries are "not temporary emergencies to be managed but the final, catastrophic outcome of over half a century of systemic dysfunction."

The "failed state" label also obscures the ongoing role of external actors. French military interventions in West Africa, American drone strikes in the Horn, Chinese resource extraction across the continent, these are not external "help" for "failing" states; they are continuations of the colonial relationship. Debiel and Lambach (2008, p. 1) offer a crucial critique, arguing that the "failed states" discourse "characterises conditions of crisis as local in origin, the product of culture or poor leadership." They contend that the current condition of structural crisis in so many of Africa's neocolonial states "must be situated in the imperial history of global capitalism" (Debiel and Lambach 2008, p. 2). This requires examining "the legacy of colonial transformation; the specific form of the postcolonial state, society and economy after independence, which tended in many cases to give rise to factional struggles and authoritarian rule; and the ways in which such 'internal' social tensions and contradictions have been reinforced by the global political economy" (Debiel and Lambach 2008, p. 3). The narrative also obscures the fact that the state is not "failed" for everyone. For elites, the state is working perfectly: it extracts resources, rewards loyalty, and suppresses dissent. The state is "failed" for the majority, but it is working for the minority.

The Phenomenological Alternative; Ubuntu and Decolonial Security

Ubuntu as Relational Security

A decolonized African security philosophy begins with a fundamental recognition: Africa is not a blank slate upon which European ideas can be written. It is a continent with millennia of philosophical traditions, political systems, conflict-resolution mechanisms, and ways of being human. The concept of Ubuntu which is often translated as "I am because we are", provides a powerful alternative to Western individualistic security models. Ubuntu is "the root of African philosophy," the "wellspring of African thought and the foundation upon which African ethics and politics are built" (Ramose 1999, p. 52). As

Nwozaku (2023, p. 48) found in a study of community development in Iyowa Community, Edo State, Nigeria, "there was good knowledge of the Ubuntu philosophy among community members," and "based on the Ubuntu Philosophy, there was increased collaboration in the community, that has led to access to resources like water, roads, community security, and other amenities."

Gyekye (1997, p. 89) extends this relational ontology: "In the African conception, a person is a person by virtue of his or her standing in a community. This does not mean that the community is prior to the individual in all respects, but that personhood is achieved through participation in community life." Menkiti (1984, p. 172) adds that "in the African view, it is the community which defines the person as person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will, or memory. The community is seen as a 'missing' link in the definition of the person."

What does Ubuntu mean for security?

First, it means that individual security cannot be separated from communal security. I cannot be safe while my neighbor is in danger. As Gundu and Modiba (2020, p. 570) explain, "in the western ideologies, identity and solidarity are conceptually separable, that is one can exist without any dependence or connection to the others, however, Ubuntu views the two as inseparable." This collectivism was "birthed by the hostile environment the early people were subjected to. It was only by community solidarity that they could survive hunger, poverty, deprivation, isolation and other challenges."

Second, it means that security is not merely the absence of violence but the presence of relationships of mutual care. Conflict resolution must prioritize restoration over punishment, reconciliation over retribution. The goal is not to defeat an enemy but to reintegrate a wayward member of the community. Clark (2010, p. 45) documents how Rwanda's Gacaca courts processed over one million cases through community-based justice, demonstrating that "restorative justice could work on a massive scale. It allowed communities to confront the past, to hold perpetrators accountable, and to begin the process of healing."

Third, Ubuntu offers a practical framework for addressing human security challenges. Masipa, Ntakana, and Raseluma (2026, p. 1) found that Ubuntu expressions such as "peer mentoring, African peer solidarity, and culturally inclusive programs were essential in promoting safety, belonging, and resilience" for African international mobile students in South African higher education institutions. The study concluded that "the human security of African international students can be greatly improved by incorporating Ubuntu-driven practices into institutional regulations, student support initiatives, and intercultural interaction."

The Phenomenology of Insecurity

Phenomenology teaches us that security is not a thing to be achieved but a condition to be experienced. It is the feeling of being able to sleep through the night. It is the confidence that your children will return from school. It is the knowledge that your community will survive the dry season. A study on peacebuilding in Nigeria's farmer-herder conflict in Adamawa State illustrates this phenomenological understanding. The researcher found that "participants, including farmers, herders, community leaders, women, youth, members of Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILCs), local facilitators, and key informants such as government extension officers and traditional leaders did not perceive peacebuilding as a top-down policy or isolated event, but as a fragile and continuous process embedded in everyday interactions" (Ojo 2025, p. 67). Central to this process were "the restoration of intergroup relationships, the revival of livelihoods, inclusion in community structures, and trust in both traditional and formal leaders" (Ojo 2025, p. 68). However, "concerns about equity, sustainability, and the exclusion of certain groups, especially herders, highlighted ongoing challenges" (Ojo 2025, p. 70).

These participants, who are the farmers, herders, and community members emphasized that "peace is experienced not only through infrastructure or training, but through the ability to live without fear, to participate meaningfully, and to feel recognized and valued" (Ojo 2025, p. 72). This study demonstrates that "peace is cultivated not in policy rooms, but in borehole queues, market paths, group meetings, and the quiet acts of coexisting again" (Ojo 2025, p. 75).

Epistemic Freedom and Decolonial Security

Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni has argued that the most profound dimension of colonialism was epistemic violence, the destruction of African ways of knowing. Colonialism did not just take African land; it took African minds. It imposed European knowledge systems as universal, superior, and unquestionable. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 1) emphasizes that epistemic freedom is "the struggle for African people to think, theorize, interpret the world and write from where they are located, unencumbered by Eurocentrism." Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 25) further explains that "epistemic violence is the imposition of one knowledge system over others, the silencing of alternative ways of knowing, and the marginalization of indigenous epistemologies." This epistemic violence continues in security studies, where African security challenges are framed in European categories: "failed states," "insurgencies," "terrorism," "border control." African responses are measured by European standards: NATO protocols, UN mandates, World Bank benchmarks. African voices are marginalized in global security discussions. African solutions are dismissed as "traditional" or "unscientific."

As Stoica (2023, p. 108) notes, "security and violence might have the same root, while security has its violent dimension or an inner violence, first of all epistemological." During

the decolonization process, "this inner epistemological violence should be deconstructed by the aim of this process, and epistemic colonization is expected to be reversed." The language of decolonization requires rethinking security not as a Western-imposed concept but as a lived reality shaped by African experiences. For Fanon (1963, p. 37), decolonization was akin to the "reclaiming of a humanity," re-elaborated by Mbembe in the humanization of the "thing" as a reversed process to the "thing-ification", the creation of "a new man, a new language and a new humanity."

Synthesizing Ubuntu and Liberal Democracy: A Hybrid Path Forward

Cyril Orji proposes a hybrid solution that combines the best of Ubuntu and liberal democracy, which he terms "**Ubuntucracy**." He argues that "an African solution to African problems must be able to meet the needs of the time. It must look to the African past to draw from its riches, particularly the African sociopolitical ethic of ubuntu. It must also look ahead and draw from the best available sociopolitical system of modern states: liberal democracy" (Orji 2022, p. 145). Orji contends that "a hybrid of these two yields ubuntucracy. Ubuntucracy removes the ghosts of both Africa and its Western colonizers and begins a new story that can help Africa survive its double bind" (Orji 2022, p. 146).

This hybrid approach recognizes that Western liberal democracy, while offering important institutional frameworks, cannot simply be imported wholesale into African contexts. As Kalu (2024, p. 248) argues, "effective state formation emanates from specific and local historical outcomes mediated by familiar social and political forces." The legitimacy and resilience of the state "are eventually based on the state's capacity to refract ideas and preferences of specific groups in local societies into general-purpose outcomes."

Kalu points to Botswana and post-genocide Rwanda as examples "that point us to a possible path of how traditional and modern institutions adhere to ensure stability and relevant political and economic progress" (Kalu 2024, p. 250). These cases demonstrate that "the people's capacity to adapt to changing knowledges that produce progressive changes is enhanced through policies that provide and maintain good schools and learning, access to good and affordable healthcare, physical security, and access to fair and equitable justice systems" (Kalu 2024, p. 251).

Botswana's success is particularly instructive. Since independence in 1966, the country has maintained one of Africa's highest growth rates, transforming itself from one of the poorest countries in the world to an upper-middle-income nation. This success has been attributed to "deliberate policy decisions, grounded in institutional reforms, transparent resource management, and long-term planning" (Hillbom 2008, p. 824). Botswana's effective governance shifted a potential resource curse, diamonds, into a model for how Africa's resource wealth can drive development.

Conclusion

The dominant Western security theories; realism, liberalism, and constructivism, fail to account for African realities because they assume a stable state, rational actors, and shared cultural foundations that do not exist on the continent. They are rooted in raced and racist intellectual foundations that pit "developed" against "undeveloped," "modern" against "primitive," "civilized" against "uncivilized" (Fredua-Mensah 2016, p. 72).

The colonial foundations of African insecurity, arbitrary borders, extractive institutions, violent governance, and illegitimate statehood, are not historical relics but active structures that continue to shape the continent's security challenges. As the cases of Sudan, South Sudan, Nigeria, the DRC, and Mali demonstrate, these structures have produced cycles of violence, displacement, and despair that cannot be resolved through military intervention alone. The article has demonstrated that Ubuntu offers a relational ontology of security that challenges the individualistic assumptions of Western theory. Ubuntu's emphasis on communal care, mutual obligation, and relationality provides a practical framework for addressing human security challenges. As Masipa, Ntakana, and Raseluma (2026, p. 2) conclude, "campuses may become places of safety and empowerment if higher education were based on an Ubuntu-oriented system based on respect and caring for one another." This insight applies equally to the broader security landscape. Ubuntu-oriented systems can transform not just campuses but communities, states, and regions.

A phenomenological and decolonized approach, rooted in African philosophy and lived experience, offers a more effective framework for understanding and addressing Africa's security challenges. It begins not with the state but with the person, not with sovereignty but with dignity, not with force but with justice. The way forward lies in what Orji calls "Ubuntucracy", a hybrid model that draws on the best of Ubuntu and liberal democracy to create "an African solution to an African problem" (Orji 2022, p. 145). This requires "intentional restructuring and reforming of the colonial/postcolonial states in Africa" (Kalu 2024, p. 252) to build institutions that serve the people and enable sustainable development.

For policymakers, this means investing in community-based security mechanisms, supporting traditional conflict-resolution institutions, and rejecting externally imposed models that ignore local realities. For scholars, it means centering African knowledge systems, engaging with African philosophy, and challenging the epistemic violence of Western security theory. For practitioners, it means designing peacebuilding interventions that prioritize relationship-building, restorative justice, and community ownership over technical fixes and top-down approaches. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 1) argues, decoloniality is "a way of thinking, knowing, and doing" that liberates post-colonial states from "the global bondage of coloniality." This is the path forward for African security scholarship and practice.

The philosopher Emil Cioran (1937/1973, p. 56) wrote: "The only way to be a philosopher is to be a witness to one's own decomposition." Africa has witnessed decomposition, of states, of communities, of lives. But it has also witnessed resilience. It has witnessed the unbreakable will to live, to love, and to hope. That will is philosophy's raw material. That will is the foundation of Africa's security.

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