

Dapo Adelugba and Philip Ogo Ujomu, eds., *Rethinking Security in Nigeria: Conceptual Issues in the Quest for Social Order and National Integration*. Dakar, CODESRIA, 2008. x plus 162.

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This book is likely to strike many readers as an audacious new intervention in one of the better known discourses in political science and international relations – the discourse on high politics. The terrain of high politics is characterized by the laws, policies and actions that states pursue in order to ensure their very survival. With its core focus on national security, high politics has conventionally been contrasted with economic and social issues that (according to conventional wisdom) have a less direct relationship to national security.

While the dichotomy between ‘high politics’ and ‘low politics’ is increasingly being questioned, with many analysts rightly seeing such a distinction as tenuous,

Rethinking Security in Nigeria attempts to move away from the realist-militarist ferment of the discourse on high politics. Indeed, the goal of the seven chapters of this book is not just to introduce an epistemology that 'softens' the realist aura that the discourse on national security has historically exuded, but also to expose the fact that 'national security' is a problematic concept whose character is not fixed.

The failure of military might, intelligence-gathering capabilities and economic prowess to guarantee the security of the world's most powerful nations necessitates a departure from a realist-militarist approach to national security. To understand the nature of insecurity in general, and in particular insecurity in a postcolonial African country like Nigeria, it is imperative to part ways with established paradigms.

It is against this background that the book offers an aesthetic-ethical-cosmological alternative, with analytical insights drawn from philosophy, theatre arts, and African and European studies. The book's substantive chapters (besides the introduction) expound on this alternative, the contributors being mainly the two editors (writing as individuals or in collaboration with each other, or with their colleagues). Five chapters are authored in this way; only chapters five and six do not have the editor's direct imprints.

The most theoretically robust exposition of the book's intent is in chapter two, authored by Ujomu. This is where the case is made for the infusion of insights from the humanities into the debate on national security. But such insights come alive only when one apprehends the limitations of the realist paradigm, which the chapter carefully documents. Ujomu's critical engagement with the 'idea and scope of security' is particularly refreshing. A realist-militarist conception of national (and international) security, Ujomu argues, fails principally because the multiple impulses lurking behind the very notion of security form a shifting configuration that is not amenable to a simple analysis.

We know, for instance, of the inherent dilemma in states' efforts to secure themselves (within their territorial boundaries): often their neighbours view such efforts as a threat to their own security. What is more, the 'idea of human security' is often discursively different from the 'idea of transnational human security'. The 'idea of societal security' is not exactly the same thing as the 'idea of women's security'. Even so, Ujomu further suggests, it seems that developed and developing countries do not quite mean the same thing when they talk of security: 'the sense of insecurity from which [Third World] states suffer, emanates, to a substantial extent, from within their boundaries'. Thus, political office holders in many Third World countries tend to define national security 'primarily in terms of regime security rather than the security of the society as a whole' (p.13). In the particular case of Nigeria, the empirical setting of the book, Ujomu criticizes 'the serious tendency [by governments to emphasize] fear, chaos and conflict as these arise from situations of violence and instability' (p.14).

As the above logic unfolds, the imperative of a new, soft idea of security becomes inescapable. It is the 'philosophical idea' – or more specifically, an 'ethical and aesthetic idea'. But what does it mean? This is the question that leaps at the reader, and which the author of chapter two tackles at considerable length. Yet the reader will be disappointed if he or she is searching for a very coherent discussion. The chapter examines themes such as imagination, morality, values, consciousness, human nature, supernaturalism (the possibility that insecurity might originate from a world beyond

the one we see), transcendentalism, inhumanity and several others. Set in Nigeria, the volume does raise issues that Nigerian readers will find familiar, but which western readers especially might find audacious, if not incomprehensible. But then an aesthetic-ethical-cosmological framework was always going to be at worst provocative, and at best a soft entry into the discourse on high politics, a terrain long driven by the realist paradigm.

Every time we come face to face with, or picture in our minds, an object we love – an object of beauty – we receive in return joy, pleasure or other emotions of comparable strength or depth. This central theme in aesthetics may have no immediate link to the subject of security. Yet, argue Ujomu and Adelugba, it does – especially when the links between aesthetics and ethics are well demonstrated. The argument is made in chapter three that once humanity begins to find value and beauty in social order, harmony and fairness, it will do all in its power to promote the ethical values and social systems within which order, harmony and fairness flourish. ‘The spectral issues arising from the interrogation of attitudes, presuppositions, norms, conduct and systems of socialization’, they maintain, ‘are all within the province of the aesthetic consideration of security’ (p.60). The chapter thus emphasizes the role of fiction, ‘possible worlds’ and cinematography in the imagining of security.

Many readers will find Irene Adadevoh’s chapter on the ‘Gender dimensions of national security and human security problematic’ equally insightful. The chapter details how non-belonging, gender inequality, segregation, the institutionalization of violence and the masculinization of security institutions have blighted the conceptualization of and quest for security. How else, she might have asked, has it become so easy to think of security in military and defence, rather than in human development, terms? Factoring gender into the security discourse immediately breaks the conventional, state-centric mould of this discourse, even though it presents challenges that Adadevoh’s chapter neither acknowledged nor examined.

The major strength of this book is its soft epistemology. It infuses the concept of security with a mundaneness that is bound to elevate its relevance among Nigerian readers particularly, and shine a new light on the country’s real vulnerabilities. By emphasizing the importance of local cosmological discourses, appealing to aesthetic, ethical and broader societal possibilities and sensibilities, and moving away from state-centric notions of security, the book fills an important gap in a discourse that has conventionally been about fear and might. At the very least, we now can speak of an ‘idea of security from below’. These strengths far outweigh the obvious syntactic weaknesses in many of the chapters.