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Security Has Left the Barracks: Towards a New Theory of African Security

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Article

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Abstract

For decades, African security has been predominantly conceptualised through a state-centric and military paradigm that prioritises territorial defence, sovereignty and armed conflict. Although this perspective remains relevant, it is increasingly inadequate for explaining the multidimensional and interconnected security challenges confronting contemporary Africa. This article strongly argues that security has progressively migrated beyond military institutions into broader societal domains. These domains are attributed with political instability, economic vulnerability, identity conflicts, cyber insecurity, community violence, public health crises and environmental changes that increasingly shape security outcomes. In order to underscore this transformation, the article introduces the Barracks Migration Theory (BMT), a theoretical framework which posits that the principal arenas of security have shifted from the barracks to seven interconnected domains: the Ballot (Political Security), Belief (Identity and Social Security), Bank (Economic and Financial Security), Borough (Community Security), Browser (Cyber and Digital Security), Body (Human and Health Security), and Biosphere (Environmental and Ecological Security). The paper draws on illustrative but concrete cases and experiences from the present-day African security challenges to prove that contemporary African insecurity is multi-domain and dynamic and spreads itself through all these domains which are perceptually distinct but interconnected. It argues that while military organizations continue to be essential for securing peace, they have ceased to own the monopoly of security affairs governance. Through the diffusion of security across societal domains, Barracks Migration Theory proposes an African perspective to understand Security Studies.

Introduction

For centuries, security was imagined behind barrack walls, guarded by soldiers and measured by the state's ability to defend its territorial sovereignty. Within this traditional imagination, security belonged principally to the state, while the military served as its principal custodian. The strength of a nation was therefore assessed by the size of its armed forces, the sophistication of its weaponry, the integrity of its territorial borders, and its capacity to deter or defeat external aggression. Security, in other words, was largely conceived as the preservation of sovereignty against military threats. This understanding has profoundly shaped both the theory and practice of security studies since the emergence of the modern state system.

The concept of security plays an important role in the field of International Relations and Security Studies, although it has remained among the most contentious concepts within the field. There have been debates on the concept of security since the creation of the modern international state system on what security is, whose security needs to be secured, how it should be determined, what threatens security, and which institutions should take responsibility for security (Baldwin, 1997; Buzan, 1991). Although such debate continues to exist up till date, the study of security during the twentieth century was mostly based on realism, where security was defined as the protection of state sovereignty from military threats coming from outside (Baldwin, 1997; Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer,

2001). Thus, security was intellectually and institutionally associated with the barracks where soldiers and weaponry represented the ability of the state to survive in the anarchical international system.

The predominance of this military-oriented approach had an enormous impact on both scholarly research and policy formulation during much of the Cold War era. Security scholarship evolved to address issues like wars, deterrence, alliances, strategic stability, competition in nuclear weapons, and conflicts between states, whereas the military became the primary guarantor of state security (Walt, 1991; Gray, 1992). As Baldwin (1997) points out, such a limited view of security focused on military threats ignoring other political, economic, social, technological, and environmental dimensions. Security was determined more by the military capabilities and borders of the states than by people's living conditions.

However, the end of the Cold War changed the notion of security practice and security scholarship fundamentally. Not only did it not diminish the significance of security, but it opened up the array of threats facing states and societies while challenging established theories about sources of insecurity and security governance. According to Buzan (1991), security transcends the military sphere and includes political, economic, societal and environmental factors that are highly interrelated. Based on this assumption, Buzan et al. (1998) showed that security is a socially constructed phenomenon through the process of securitization in which political agents declare issues existential threats that require extreme solutions. The same approach was taken by the Human Security concept developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1994) and focusing on individual security and emphasizing freedom from fear, freedom from want and the protection of human dignity. Finally, the Critical Security Studies undermined the orthodox paradigm with the idea that security should be addressed as emancipation, power relations, identities and structural disparities instead of being military-centric (Booth, 1991; Booth, 2007; Krause & Williams, 1997). Taken together, all these intellectual contributions expanded the scope of the security agenda and showed that contemporary insecurity cannot be analysed based only on the power of the military alone.

Indeed, Africa appears to represents one of the clearest examples of how things have changed since the emergence of these intellectual innovations. In this continent, it is becoming evident that the most serious security challenges do not originate from war between states, but from interconnected and multidimensional threats that go beyond the military domain. Electoral violence undermines the authority of democratic states; kidnapping has become a highly profitable business model through ransom money; financial fraud is performed through cyber space instead of exploiting geographic weaknesses; climate change increases competition over natural resources, migration and transhumance; identity politics causes ethnic and religious conflicts; diseases expose the interconnectedness of national security and public health; and disinformation circulating online is affecting politics (Aning & Atta-Asamoah, 2011; Obi, 2010; Olonisakin, 2015). It is therefore clear that today's insecurity is being produced in various domains beyond the traditional battlefield.

Despite the significant broadening of security analysis by modern security studies, there is still an important limitation in the existing theoretical framework. While the current approaches have succeeded in extending the number of security sectors and referent objects, they have been unable to study these areas in an integrated manner or as sectoral extensions of traditional security theory. As a result, little effort has been paid to understanding the overall process of transformation during which security itself moved from the military realm to the more diverse set of political, economic, social, technological, ecological and human spheres, which now increasingly shape the security of African states. Modern African insecurity seldom arises in one particular area. The economic crisis leads to political instability, political instability creates social tensions, social tensions create identity exclusion, environmental degradation contributes to migration and rivalry for resources, cyber disinformation affects the functioning of democracy, and health crises undermine the economy and institution legitimacy.

This article suggests that contemporary African security can be diagnosed via the 'Barracks Migration Theory (BMT)'. The main premise of the theory is that, although the military continues to be an essential institution for the defense of the nation, it is not the exclusive or primary locus of security in twenty-first century Africa. On the contrary, security has steadily been migrating into seven different yet related spheres that define the making of insecurity: the Ballot (Political and Democratic Security); the Belief (Identity and Social Cohesion Security); the Bank (Economic and Financial Security); the Borough (Community Security); the Browser (Cyber and Digital Security); the Body (Human and Health Security); and the Biosphere (Environmental and Ecological Security). It also posits that these spheres operate as an ecosystem of security whereby any disturbance that emanates from any one sphere tends to migrate to other spheres, creating multi-dimensional security problems that cannot be solved by purely military concepts.

The study problematizes the persistence of militaristic approaches to understanding security in Africa in light of the evolution of current security threats. Second, the study constructs the Barracks Migration Theory as a intellectual lens through which one can analyze the migration of security from militaristic structures to the interconnected spaces of society. Third, the study contributes to the study of African security by presenting a multidimensional approach to analyzing African security through the interplay between the processes of politics, economy, community, digital, human, environmental, and identity security spheres that together result in current manifestations of insecurity in Africa.

The Barracks Metaphor in Security Thinking

The development of security as a field of study has been largely influenced by the advent of the modern sovereign state and the realism theory in International Relations. Following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence became the core elements of the international system, obliging states to perceive survival as their primary goal. In this framework, security was mainly viewed in terms of protection of the state from military attacks from outside, while armed forces became the main instruments for ensuring the survival of a state (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979). This implies that the military power, deterrence and defense of territories were regarded as the

key factors of the security policy of a state, thus highlighting the fact that there could be no survival without military strength. A militarized perspective gained further strength because of the theory of realism that dominated international studies, where international system is anarchical and this does not feature any institution that can safeguard the states from external threat (Waltz, 1979). This means that under the anarchic condition, states are required to help themselves, possess military capabilities and deterrence power to defend against their rivals.

The militarized perspective was even institutionalized due to realist theoretical perspectives, which saw the international system as anarchical, with no central authority that is able to provide protection for states from any external threat (Waltz, 1979). Under anarchy, states are forced to use self-help strategy and build up military capabilities and deterrence powers in order to guard themselves against their competitors (Mearsheimer, 2001). The notion of national security was linked to military preparedness, and thus defense ministries, intelligence services, and armies played an important role in governing security issues. According to Baldwin (1997), conventional security studies emphasized military threats more than other types of vulnerability, which strengthened the idea that security is a state issue.

Within this orthodox framework, the barracks were no longer simply a physical space to house soldiers but a highly symbolic space representing the institutional and intellectual home of security. The barracks represented the monopoly of the state to use violence in a legitimate manner, its ability to be a force that could use violence when necessary, and its preparedness to protect its territory from external attacks. Increasing the security of a nation, therefore, meant increasing the strength of the barracks by spending more money on defense and improving the military capabilities of a nation. As a result of this, the field of security studies remained largely within the domain of the military.

However, the end of the Cold War era and the rise of highly complicated global issues proved that there were some weaknesses in such a conception of security. According to some scholars like Buzan (1991), security encompasses not only military issues but also political, economic, social and environmental issues that pose life-threatening risks to countries and societies. In addition, the Copenhagen School showed that security can be constructed through the process of securitization, and it goes beyond mere military threats (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). Furthermore, Human Security was another concept that questioned the state-oriented approach by considering individuals and their protection against non-military threats, such as poverty, diseases, and repression (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994).

The obvious shortcomings of the military approach to security are especially established in modern-day Africa because a number of the prominent security issues that the continent faces today do not stem from the battlefield. Cybercrimes undermine the financial infrastructure without violating any border; election violence threatens democratic security; kidnapping is now a profitable venture; climate change leads to conflict for resources and migration; pandemics reveal the weakness of the healthcare system and economy. Such threats are too complex to resolve using only the military approach because they stem from a number of complex processes that are political, economic, technological, community-

related, and environmental. The barracks thus remain an important instrument for defending the country, but they do not become the only residence of security anymore. This invites attention to need for a different theory to explain how security moves out of the barracks and enters other spheres of modern-day African society.

The Migration of Security

The changes in the international system in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century have radically changed the nature of security threats and the mechanisms that are supposed to manage them. While according to the conventional security paradigm, military institutions were the main guarantors of security of the state, modern practice shows that many of the most serious threats faced by states and societies come from areas far from the realm of warfare. Security is not less important. On the contrary, its meaning has broadened to encompass security in the social, political, economic, technological, and environmental spheres. The migration of security is the term that describes this process in this article as one of the transitions of the central arenas of security from military institutions to a variety of social realms.

Globalization has significantly changed the nature of production and delivery of security threats due to increased interconnection between countries. Since trade, money, information and people have been crossing borders more often and faster, security threats have also become transnational, dispersed and difficult to tackle with military means (Held et al., 1999; Baylis et al., 2023). Organized crime, cyber-crime, terrorism, pandemics, illicit financial flows and networks of transnational traffickers work across different territories with unprecedented speed. Therefore, the security of one country depends on processes which occur outside its borders, defying the old idea that military power is enough for securing the state.

Democratisation has also impacted the notion of security through the increase in the number of actors and processes that shape its governance. In many African countries, the democratisation process has brought the concept of elections, constitutionality, and participation in politics as some of the important pillars of national security. Violence during elections, decline in democracy, lack of political participation, and crisis in the constitution have become some of the most important threats to national security without necessarily having any direct involvement of military force (Ake, 1996; Lindberg, 2006).

The quick development of technology has made security migration even faster. Digital revolution has made many new spheres in which insecurity takes place. Cybercrime, online frauds, digital surveillance, misinformation, identity theft, cyber espionage and AI-enabled dangers challenge the authority of state, economy and society (Singer & Friedman, 2014). In Africa, new spaces have been created by digital revolution for the political mobilization, economic innovation and communication, but at the same time such digital spaces have opened up new possibilities for cybercrime and information war. Hence, the ‘Browser’ has become just as strategic as the border in contemporary security governance. Climate change has been another strong cause for security migration. Environmental pollution, desertification,

floods, increase of temperature, lack of resources has caused displacement, insecurity and communal conflicts especially in vulnerable parts of Africa (Homer-Dixon, 1999; IPCC, 2023). Increased cases of farmer-herder clashes, climate migration and competition over scarce resources prove that ecology has become one of the factors in determining security. This threat cannot be solved militarily because of its environmental nature.

There have been transformations in the geography of insecurity due to economic development as well. Modern economies are highly connected within the global financial system and can be easily subjected to financial crises, money laundering, cyberfraud, and economic exclusion. Economic insecurity is often reflected in high unemployment rates, poverty, inequalities, and criminal entrepreneurship, which creates an environment conducive for kidnappings, violent extremism, and organized crime groups.

Equally important, however, is the issue of human movement and urbanization. Cross-border human movement, displacement, refugees and nomadism have generated security problems which go beyond traditional concepts of territorial security. At the same time, urbanization has brought together people in cities where poverty, unemployment, informal housing arrangements and poor governance provide an ideal environment for organized crime and gang activity (UN-Habitat, 2022). Security governance, as a result, has been forced to deal with increasingly complicated inter-relationships between communities, local authorities, police and civil society organizations as opposed to depending on military power alone.

As a whole, these changes in the structure show that security has neither vanished nor become less important. On the contrary, the main areas where it operates have been gradually shifting from military organisations to politics, economics, digital realm, community, humanity and environment which form part of daily existence in today's Africa. The barracks are still essential to ensure national sovereignty in the face of traditional military threats; however, they are not the only sites of production and governance of security anymore. Despite acknowledging the existence of such new challenges, however, current security theories still try to understand them in rather isolated and sectoral ways. This prompts the need to review these theories and show their explanatory strength as well as the necessity of the Barracks Migration Theory (BMT).

The Limits of Existing Security Theories

Of importance is to place on record that the development of security studies has been marked by the series of theories that have sought to extend the concept of security beyond its conventional roots in military establishments. Every prominent theoretical approach to security has contributed to the expansion of security through the introduction of new referents, sectors, or mechanisms of analysis. However, in spite of the valuable insights of each theoretical approach, no particular theory has sought to explain the shift of security from military to societal areas.

Realism continues to be the base of security studies theories. Classic realists like Morgenthau (1948) claim that the quest for power and security of the nation interests are part of human nature whereas

structural realists like Waltz (1979) consider insecurity to be due to anarchy in the international system. For both, the state remains the main referent object of security and military power is the prime tool for securing survival. However, although realism can continue to provide useful knowledge regarding interstate rivalries, deterrence and competitions, the utility of the concept as an explanation of current problems facing the continent like cyber-crimes, electoral violence, diseases like HIV/AIDS, climate change and criminal economies cannot be explained by military means alone (Williams, 2023).

Liberalism expands the security agenda by emphasizing international institutions, economic interdependence, democratic governance, and cooperation as the means for lowering conflicts (Keohane, 1984). Indeed, the liberals are right in asserting that institutions like the African Union and ECOWAS play an important role in conflict prevention and regional stability. Nonetheless, liberalism is mainly concerned with state-to-state cooperation and institutional collaboration rather than elucidating how security has moved beyond its traditional domains into digital, communal, economic, and environmental realms.

The Human Security approach marked a fundamental break away from state-based security, shifting its focus from protecting the state to securing its citizens (United Nations Development Programme, 1994). With its emphasis on economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security, Human Security expanded the scope of security considerably. Although Human Security highlights several aspects of insecurity, it does not sufficiently address the processes that link different fields together or move insecurity across them.

In a similar fashion, the Copenhagen School and its securitisation theory radically changed the field of security studies by proposing that security is socially constructed through political discourse rather than being objectively defined by material threats (Buzan et al., 1998). Securitisation Theory effectively explains the process by which issues like migration, terrorism or climate change are discursively constructed to become security issues. Yet, its focus mainly deals with the politics of constructing threats, rather than with explaining the processes of moving the security problem to different areas of society, as well as interaction between them after they are securitised.

Moreover, Critical Security Studies have critically addressed orthodox approaches to security by challenging state-centric theories and focusing on emancipation, structural violence and human freedom as the ultimate goals of security (Booth, 2007; Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2021). For instance, the idea of the Risk Society developed by Beck (1992) shows how modern societies face increasing amounts of artificially created risks such as technological breakdowns, environmental problems and global uncertainties, while the New Wars thesis by Kaldor (2012) highlights how contemporary wars become the wars of non-state actors, identity politics and transnational networks instead of interstate wars. However, the majority of them appears to have their main focus on particular aspects of the transformation process rather than offering a comprehensive theoretical framework for explaining how security evolves from the military sector into several reinforcing societal spheres.

In all, these approaches have significantly advanced the field of security studies and will always be vital for future researchers in the discipline. Nonetheless, they primarily focus on the conceptualization of security along sectoral, institutional or discursive terms while failing to theorize the process through which the major arenas of security have gone through such a shift from the barracks. Modern-day African insecurities are hardly limited to isolated sectors alone but rather, political tensions, economic problems, digital risks, identity clashes, ecological destructions and communal violence are interlinked in many ways. The necessity to bridge the conceptual gap is what BMT attempts to address by proposing that the process of migration of security has gradually moved from the military institution to seven different domains. See Table 1.1 below:

Table 1.1

The table below shows a comparison of major existing security theories as precursors to this study:

THEORY	REFERENT OBJECT	KEY FOCUS	CONTRIBUTION	DISCERNIBLE LIMITATIONS
Realism	The state	Focuses on military power, sovereignty, survival, interstate conflict	It gives remarkable insights on national security, deterrence and strategic competition	It over-emphasises military security; struggles to explain non-traditional and multidomain threats
Liberalism	State and international institutions	Primarily focuses on cooperation, democracy, economic interdependence	Offers valuable insights on the role of institutions and collective security	The theory does not explain how security shifts into societal domains
Human Security	Individual actors	Protection from economic, health, political and environmental threats	It broadens security knowledge beyond the institutionalization of the state	The theory identifies multiple threats but does not explain how they interact or migrate across domains
Copenhagen School	Securitized	Security as a social and political construction	It gives valuable insights on how issues become security concerns	Focuses on threat construction rather than multidomain security migration
Critical Security Studies	Individuals and the Society	It focuses the question of emancipation, structural violence and justice	Challenges state-centric approaches and broadens security thinking	Provides normative critique but lacks an integrated model of multidomain security dynamics
Risks Security	Society	Global and Manufactured risks	It offers valuable explanations on modern technological and environmental risks	Focuses on risk production rather than the relocation of security

The table shows the gradual development of Security Studies from a very restrictive approach based on military concerns to wider definitions of security. Starting with Realism and focusing on the state, military power and territorial integrity, later theories gradually widen the referent object of security to international organisations, people, societies and global threats respectively. The Human Security theory focuses on individual welfare, the Copenhagen School shows how some issues are securitised, the Critical Security Theory calls for liberation from structural violence, Risk Society talks about artificial risks on the global level, and the New Wars Theory defines the new features of wars. In sum, these

approaches have made an enormous contribution to security studies making it more diverse by widening the concept of security beyond its traditional meaning. Nevertheless, one can find out one general analytical flaw in all these theories. Despite their significant contributions to the description of different dimensions of the current security problems, these theories fail to explain theoretically how security actually transfers from military structures to society or how insecurity moves across different domains. The Barracks Migration Theory attempts to fill this void through its theory of security, which views security as a process that is dynamic and interlinked and whose major arenas have transcended the barracks to encompass seven realms.

Introducing the Barracks Migration Theory (BMT)

The evolving nature of security in the twenty-first century requires more than simply an extension of security thinking, but rather a reconsideration of where security is located and the processes through which it becomes insecure. Although modern security theory has increasingly broadened its focus to incorporate political, economic, societal, environmental and human aspects of security (Buzan, 1991; Booth, 2007; UNDP, 1994), it has relatively neglected the issue of security's spatial and institutional relocation. This study seeks to fill the gap in theory through the development of a new theory called the Barracks Migration Theory (BMT), which offers an explanation of the process of security migration from the military to other interlinked societal sectors that shape African security. According to the Barracks Migration Theory, security migration is characterized by the gradual shift of the major spaces where security production, challenges and governance take place, moving away from the military space into political, economic, social, technological, human and environmental spaces. The Barracks Migration Theory does not hold that military organizations are outdated. They have not been made redundant at all. On the contrary, the army is vital to guaranteeing territorial sovereignty and addressing any conventional military challenges. Instead, the BMT holds that security has stopped being monopolized by the military space. The barracks have become an important center for governing security, but this space is no longer its sole location.

Ontology of the Barracks Migration Theory

The ontology of any theory deals with the nature of reality which the theory attempts to explain. The ontological premise of the Barracks Migration Theory is that security is dynamic, relational and multidimensional. It is neither static nor institutional. Security is defined not only as the absence of war but as the ability of states, institutions, and societies to be politically stable, economically resilient, socially cohesive, technologically sound, safe, healthy, and ecologically sustainable. Therefore, security becomes an ecosystem with multiple and interconnected domains and their interactions make up for vulnerability and resilience. In contrast to other security theories which define security as something that happens within the state and its armed forces, the security in BMT is the interplay of institutions and societies. Security does not have a single source; on the contrary, it spreads across different domains. An economic breakdown may cause political instability, which in turn may lead to communal violence,

which may contribute to the exclusion of certain groups based on their identity; digital misinformation can create political polarization; and environmental destruction causes migration and violent competition for natural resources.

The 7Bs Framework

The key analytical model of BMT has been developed through seven interrelated areas, which have been referred to as Seven Bs model. These areas are major areas in which the concept of security has shifted in contemporary Africa. See Fig. 1.1 below:

Figure 1.1: The 7Bs Framework of Security

Source: Author's Design, December, 2025.

(1) Ballot (Political and Democratic Security)

The first domain is the Ballot, and it stands for Political/Democratic Security. In this case, security pertains to election process, constitutionalism, political participation and democracy. Elections, which have been viewed as purely political occurrences, have gradually turned into security problems since election violence, constitutional crises and deterioration of democratic institutions pose threats to the country's stability.

(2) Belief (Identity and Social Security)

Domain number two is the Belief, which stands for Identity and Social Security. At the heart of this domain lies the argument that ethnicity, religion, ideologies, nationalism and other forms of identity are gaining importance when it comes to the development of either cooperation or conflicts. This is proven by mobilization based on identity, hate speech, extremism, xenophobia and what can be termed Afrophobic disorder.

(3) Bank (Economic and Financial Security)

Being one of the fundamental domains, the Bank stands for Economic and Financial Security. Insecurity in today's world is more and more connected with unemployment, illegal flows of money, organized cybercrimes, economic disparity, inflation, and financial instability. Sustainable security thus presupposes economically resilient institutions no less than military capacity.

(4) Borough (Community Security)

The fourth primary domain is the Borough, denoting Community Security. Communities face increasing insecurities through kidnappings, organized crime, community conflicts, urban violence and poor local

governance. The area highlights the need for community resilience, policing, traditional structures and community involvement in security management.

(5) Browser (Cyber and Digital Security)

The fifth domain is the Browser, which stands for Cyber and Digital Security. With the advent of digitization, there has been the development of new theaters of insecurity, where the threat of cybercrime, information war, cyber espionage, identity theft, and digital manipulation has become more prominent, threatening not only nations but even individuals.

(6) Body (Human and Health Security)

The sixth domain is the Body, which symbolizes Human and Health Security. Public health crises, pandemics, food insecurity, mental health crises and personal safety become critical elements of national resilience. The case of the coronavirus pandemic proves that any threat to human well-being can turn into political, economic and national security crises.

(7) Biosphere (Environmental and Ecological Security)

The seventh, being the last of the domains, is the Biosphere, which signifies Environmental and Ecological Security. Climate change, environmental damage, extinction of species, desertification, floods, and lack of resources have become important factors that affect migration, livelihood and wars. In this respect, ecological sustainability has become essential for national security.

Interconnectedness of the Seven Domains

The seven domains of the Barracks Migration Theory (BMT) are interconnected because contemporary security threats rarely emerge or remain confined within a single sphere. Instead, insecurity is multidimensional, with disruptions in one domain often triggering cascading effects across others. For instance, political instability in the Ballot can fuel identity tensions in the Belief, weaken community cohesion in the Borough, undermine investor confidence in the Bank, and facilitate the spread of misinformation through the Browser. Similarly, environmental degradation in the Biosphere may reduce livelihoods, increase migration, intensify communal conflicts and ultimately threaten human well-being in the Body. See Fig. 1.2 below for the Security Migration Cycle:

Source: Author's Illustration, 2026.

One of the most fundamental features of the Barracks Migration Theory (BMT) is that the seven different dimensions of security operate not as separate worlds, but as elements of a single, dynamic system of security ecosystems. The security situation of today is marked by constant interrelation, whereby changes in one dimension often cause changes in another. Such a characteristic is reflective of the increasingly complicated nature of African security, whereby the political, economic, social, technological, human and environmental factors constantly affect each other (Buzan, 1991; Buzan et al., 1998). Security cannot be viewed as a series of separate sectors but rather as an emerging web of

mutually reinforcing connections. It follows then that the core idea of BMT is that security migrates from one dimension to another while insecurity is spread through interaction and diffusion.

The Ballot, which is a symbol of political and democratic security, acts as an instigator in many occasions for security dynamics involving more than one domain. Weak governance, contested elections, unconstitutional change of governments and lack of legitimacy of institutions tend to cause insecurity which goes much beyond the political domain (Ake, 1996; Lindberg, 2006). Contestations in the electoral process may escalate ethnic and religious cleavages in the Belief domain, cause violent conflicts in the Borough, erode economic development and confidence in the Bank, and lead to misinformation and political machinations in the Browser. In the course of political insecurity continuing over time, access to health care, education and social services will become difficult leading to insecurity of the Body, and poor environmental governance of the Biosphere.

Both identity and social cohesion in the Belief also have effects on different spheres of security. The identity issues, including ethnic, religious and ideological, have more and more often been considered as sources of social cohesion and violent mobilization in African states (Booth, 2007; Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2021). The hate speech, xenophobia, religious fanaticism and identity politics usually deteriorate the relationships within communities and generate communal conflicts, which in their turn destroy democracy in the country. Moreover, polarization based on identity might lead to lower economic productivity due to low level of investments and labour movement. Thus, insecurity from the Belief often spreads out into the Borough, Browser, Ballot and Bank.

The economic and financial stability of the Bank is also influential in all other areas under consideration. High levels of unemployment, inflation, poverty, and inequality lead to increased opportunities for organised crime, terrorism, cybercrime, and political instability (Held et al., 1999; UNDP, 1994). Economic crisis leads to erosion of trust in democratic systems, exacerbation of conflicts in communities, and migration, while lack of funding limits government ability to provide people with adequate healthcare, environmental protection, and cybersecurity. On the other hand, the existence of economic institutions makes states legitimate, promotes the development of communities, and eliminates vulnerabilities that can be used by criminals.

With the fast-paced adoption of digital technologies, the Browser has become one of the most connected domains in the context of the BMT model. In the case of cybercrime, disinformation, cyber espionage, and other related issues, it becomes clear that these factors are going to transcend geographical boundaries as well as affect different political, economic, and societal processes at the same time (Singer & Friedman, 2014). Disinformation online can affect elections in the Ballot, encourage hatred in the Belief, and cause financial problems for the Bank sector. Disinformation can be harmful to public health efforts including vaccination programs during emergencies within the Body domain as well.

The Body, which stands for human and health security, holds a central place in the interactive dynamics of BMT as human security not only influences but is influenced by events occurring within the other six domains. The global COVID-19 pandemic showed that issues regarding public health can soon turn into

problems pertaining to politics, economics, and society, thus involving matters related to governance, work, learning, and community (World Health Organization, 2022). Moreover, the existence of insecurity in communities often leads to displacement and problems with mental health, whereas the environmental problem poses risks to the availability of food and diseases.

Furthermore, the Biosphere emphasizes the interconnection of the current security issues. The effects of climate change, desertification, floods, extinction of species and environmental degradation become more important for livelihoods, migration, and struggle over resources (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2023). Environmental threats often lead to the inability to produce food in the Bank, increased migration in the Borough, struggle over identity in the Belief and political tensions in the Ballot. Thus, ecological insecurity proves that environmental factors cannot be viewed as marginal to security governance anymore. They become an integral part of security itself.

In all, the above interactions show that these seven domains should be viewed not as isolated domains of security but rather as a security ecosystem as a whole. The nature of insecurity is highly dynamic and multifaceted and involves disturbance in one sphere triggering disturbance in another sphere via multiple feedback loops. The multidomain nature of the Barracks Migration Theory sets it apart from other security theories in that it provides not just an account of the location of security but also its movement, interaction and diffusion throughout society. Modern-day security governance in Africa thus calls for concerted efforts to acknowledge the interdependent nature of the Ballot, Belief, Bank, Borough, Browser, Body and Biosphere rather than resorting to military solutions alone.

Core Assumptions of the Theory

The Barracks Migration Theory rests on five fundamental assumptions.

1. Security is dynamic. It evolves as a direct response to changes in technology, governance, society and the international system.
2. Security migrates. As societies transform, the principal arenas of insecurity relocate beyond military institutions into broader societal domains.
3. Military institutions remain necessary but are no longer sufficient. The armed forces continue to protect sovereignty, yet they cannot independently resolve challenges such as cybercrime, electoral violence, pandemics or climate-induced conflicts.
4. Security is multidomain. No single institution or sector possesses a monopoly over security because contemporary threats are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.
5. Insecurity diffuses. Disturbances produced within one domain frequently spread into others. This nourishes cascading crises that require integrated governance rather than isolated policy responses.

Operationalising the Barracks Migration Theory

A theory needs to move beyond mere conceptualization in order to add value to scientific knowledge since there is a need for the theory to be put into practical use and tested through empirical research. It is for this reason that the Barracks Migration Theory (BMT) is operationalized through the identification of visible variables which represent both the movement of security and the spread of insecurity within society. Through this operationalization, it becomes possible to test the theory's explanatory power, conduct cross-country comparisons of security, and track changes in security governance (Babbie, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The core idea of security migration can be captured through assessing the level of dominance of threats to security and policy measures for their mitigation within the seven domains. For instance, in the Ballot, some of the indicators may include electoral violence, unconstitutional change in government, voter intimidation, political instability and trust in the democratic system. In the case of the Belief domain, the assessment will be done through the measurement of identity-based disputes, religious fundamentalism, hate speech, xenophobic attacks and social coherence. In the Bank, the indicators include unemployment, inflation, income disparities, money laundering, cybercrime against banks and economic resilience.

In the same way, the Browser can be measured based on indicators like instances of cyber-crime, digital fraud, disinformation efforts, internet governance, cybersecurity preparedness, and digital literacy. The Body can be measured based on measures of public health resilience, pandemic preparedness, food security, psychological well-being, and personal safety. Lastly, the Biosphere can be evaluated based on indicators including disasters due to climate change, environmental degradation, desertification, loss of biodiversity, migration due to climate change, and resource-based conflict (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023).

BMT also involves the evaluation of cross-domain and cross-border flow of insecurities. This includes the investigation of whether insecurities in one domain lead to any observable consequences in other domains. For example, the occurrence of a disputed election could lead to communal violence, economic disturbance, online disinformation, and humanitarian migration, showing multidomain security migration.

Such comparative case studies, longitudinal study and mixed methods research are especially suited for the investigation of these relationships. The definition of indicators and relationships makes Barracks Migration Theory an empirically testable theoretical framework that can produce empirical knowledge, policy formulation and theoretical development in the field of African Security Studies and the wider field of Security Studies (George & Bennett, 2005; Gerring, 2012).

Theoretical Proposition of BMT

The core assumption of Barracks Migration Theory is that the main theatres of security in modern-day Africa have moved from the realm of military establishments to seven interdependent societal fields of action, which shape the creation, spread and regulation of insecurity. Military force will always play a

vital role in safeguarding the country from the usual threats, but the ability to resist challenges to the viability of modern African societies relies on the efficient governance of the Ballot, the Belief, the Bank, the Borough, the Browser, the Body and the Biosphere.

Explaining African Security Through the Lens of Barracks Migration Theory

Given the ever-evolving nature of Africa's security environment, there is clearly a need for theories that have the capacity to account for threats that go beyond what might be considered conventional military threats. While traditional security theories are useful in the understanding of interstate competition and defence mechanisms in addition to the use of military power, current insecurities in Africa emanate from political, economic, social, technological, health and ecological processes (Buzan, 1991; Buzan & Hansen, 2009; Collins, 2022; Williams, 2023). Human Security also added on to the meaning of security by changing the focus from state protection to individual protection from diverse vulnerabilities (UNDP, 1994; Booth, 2007). Barracks Migration Theory (BMT) borrows from this development, although it addresses a slightly different issue by focusing on how the point of security has shifted from being in military establishments and how insecurity created in one sphere can be transferred to another interrelated sphere.

This model is compatible with the philosophy of systems thinking, which stresses the importance of connections, interdependencies, and the repercussions that modifications to one component of the system may have on others (Meadows, 2008). Similarly, Buzan (1991) acknowledged that different military, political, economic, societal, and environmental fields could be analyzed separately despite the fact that they were linked in practice. BMT takes this idea a step further by stressing that what is important is the process of transferring insecurity from one domain to another. Thus, Seven Bs – Ballot, Belief, Bank, Borough, Browser, Body and Biosphere – provide a conceptual framework to study where, how, and what consequences may result from insecurity being transferred from one domain to others.

This example includes electoral violence. Political scientists studying Africa have identified the tendency of the electoral process to be vulnerable to manipulation, contestation and violence, especially in cases where political institutions are weak or political competition very polarized (Ake, 1996; Lindberg, 2006; Cheeseman, 2015). According to the BMT theory, an electoral conflict originally confined to the Ballot might become associated with security issues when political elites politicize ethnic, religious or regional cleavages in the Belief realm. In this case, politicization might lead to violence, displacement and the weakening of community cohesion in the Borough. While digital disinformation and provocative communication escalate the conflict via the Browser, economic problems in the Bank make the political situation even more difficult, increasing the grievances of people and decreasing their ability to cope with political conflicts. Thus, the BMT framework cannot substitute the political explanation of electoral violence but only helps to understand its multidomain consequences.

The other example that can be taken into consideration is that of kidnapping and organised crime. Studies have indicated that the rise of organised violence has been linked to factors such as weak

governance, low economic opportunities, and lack of control by the state (Reno, 2011; Ellis, 2016). Conventional approaches, such as those of policing and deployment of military force, are crucial in addressing kidnapping if they pose threats to territorial control and security. In the case of BMT, however, it highlights the connection between various areas. For instance, economic hardship in the Bank can fuel criminal motives; lack of political and institutional governance in the Ballot can hinder any preventive efforts or accountability; vulnerabilities in the Borough area can act as locations where criminals operate; while the technological advances in the Browser can help in communicating, surveillance and negotiation of ransom. The impacts, in the end, are felt on the Body in terms of fear, trauma and threats to personal security.

Cyber insecurity also serves to highlight the changing nature of security. With the proliferation of technology comes the potential vulnerability of cybercrime, fraud, identity theft, espionage, and information manipulation (Singer & Friedman, 2014; Nye, 2017). In a digitally connected Africa, insecurity arising out of the Browser may have implications for the Bank through financial loss, the Ballot through electoral interference or misinformation, and the Belief system through hate speech, polarisation, and radical mobilisation. The reason why this relationship is important is because the origin of the insecurity may be digital, yet its impacts political, economic and social at the same time.

Climate change, like cyber insecurity, is another example of an interrelated problem. Issues relating to environmental degradation, changes in rain patterns, and resource availability may impact the livelihoods and mobility of individuals as well as their relationships with other groups. Indeed, studies have highlighted climate change and environmental issues as contributing to existing vulnerabilities and potential conflicts (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Busby, 2022; IPCC, 2023). Within BMT, insecurity from the Biosphere may have impacts for the Bank through livelihood loss, the Borough through land and water competition, the Belief system through identity politics, and the Ballot through political pressure.

The coronavirus pandemic is yet another example of a non-military threat creating repercussions in several domains of security. Although starting off as a Body issue, the COVID-19 pandemic created a lot of repercussions for the economy, for governance, for society, and for information. There were economic repercussions that hit the Bank, there were issues of emergency that created problems for the Ballot, misinformation spread via the Browser, and fear and stigma hit the Belief domain (UNDP, 2022; WHO, 2022).

For this reason, BMT neither undermines nor contradicts the prevailing security theories; rather, it borrows from the multidimensional nature of Human Security theory, the sectoral nature of the Copenhagen School, the emancipatory character of Critical Security Studies, the concept of manufactured risks by Beck (1992), and the shifting nature of conflict highlighted by Kaldor (2012). The unique contribution of BMT is its theorization of locus migration and security transfer; that is, security is increasingly being generated, felt, and governed in various intersecting realms, and the insecurity that occurs in one realm can spread, multiply, or even create feedback loops in other realms. BMT thus

provides a model of how African security is becoming a multidomain ecosystem where the military remains a relevant node but no longer the only one.

Implications of the Barracks Migration Theory for Security Studies

Barracks Migration Theory (BMT) has helped in advancing the field of Security Studies by providing an approach for analysing changes in the locus and structure of security in the current century. Approaches developed so far have greatly expanded the scope of security from purely military considerations by highlighting its political, societal, economic, human and environmental aspects (Buzan, 1991; Buzan & Hansen, 2009). But little research has been done on the process of dispersal of security into inter-connected areas as well as how insecurities arising from one area affect another. The BMT theory seeks to fill this gap in knowledge by conceptualizing security as a dynamic process whereby the locus of security moves away from purely military organizations to other inter-related societal areas.

BMT works as a complement to existing approaches like Realism, Human Security, the Copenhagen School, and Critical Security Studies (Booth, 2007; Buzan et al., 1998; UNDP, 1994; Waltz, 1979). It offers a conceptual language with which to examine issues of security migration and transmission across domains. Instead of looking at political, economic, social, cyber, human, and environmental insecurities as completely independent analytical challenges, BMT looks at ways in which insecurity might arise in one domain, spread to others, intensify due to the interplay of all domains, and produce feedback loops. The Seven Bs, therefore, serve as a framework for tracing the routes by which the security issue has emerged and gained more significance.

The above theory also has implications for the empirical study of security within Security Studies. BMT provides testable propositions that may be analyzed using comparative case studies, process tracing, qualitative analysis, and quantitative analysis where applicable. This means that one can study whether economic insecurity leads to political instability, whether political competition gets heightened by identity politics and digital misinformation, or environmental insecurity contributes to community conflict and livelihood insecurity. In this regard, BMT thus offers a platform for shifting from identification of multi-dimensional security threats to their interrelationships and transmission paths. It is not the theory's role to argue that security has just been made multi-dimensional; rather, it should help understand migration and interactions between security concerns in different domains.

Limitations of the Study

This study is essentially theoretical and conceptual and thus is not meant to offer complete empirical support for the Barracks Migration Theory in every African environment. The seven categories outlined in this theory are analytically derived and thus should not be seen as absolute and independent categories, as the level and degree of insecurity differ in each case. This limitation is taken care of by use of examples from African cases to highlight the usefulness of the theory while acknowledging the need for

empirical analysis at the same time. Therefore, the study is meant to present the Barracks Migration Theory as an analytically useful and empirically insightful framework.

Conclusion

The Barracks Migration Theory (BMT) provides insights to foreground the argument that even as military organisations continue to be vital for territorial sovereignty defence and the management of conventional security threats, they no longer enjoy the monopoly as the only domain of security management in the present-day Africa. Through globalisation, digitalisation, democratisation, climate change, economic restructuring and people movement, globalisation has remarkably transformed the security context of the African continent such that the production and governance of security has now been moved from the barracks to interlinked societal domains. The security migration framework provided by BMT is a useful theory to underscore how insecurities emerge and interact. It shows how security migrates in the Ballot, the Belief, the Bank, the Borough, the Browser, the Body and the Biosphere domains. It therefore attempts a bridge the gaps of existing theories of security that tend to focus more on threats in military, sectoral and discourse terms but do not consider the interconnectivity between the domains (Buzan, 1991; Buzan et al., 1998; Booth, 2007). More than its theoretical significance, BMT offers a conceptual model to help deal with Africa's increasingly sophisticated security concerns in an integrated governance system as opposed to institution-specific solutions. Of course, security has not left the barracks but the barracks seems to have lost the monopoly of managing security crises. However, in order to understand Africa's security in the 21st Century, one has to follow security to wherever it relocates, and wherever it resides.

Statements and Declarations

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Author Contributions:

Temitope L. Adeola provided the conceptualization of the study, reviewed and developed the theoretical framework, conducted and synthesised the literature review, analysied the literature, and wrote and revised the manuscript. He proofread and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission and publication.

Data Availability:

For this study there were no datasets generated or analysed. The study relied primarily on on existing scholarly literature and publicly available secondary sources, which are appropriately cited in the manuscript.

Ethical Approval

For the sake of the writing of this article, there were no comtacts with human participants, as the data was informed by the searches made by authors.

Informed Consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

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Figures

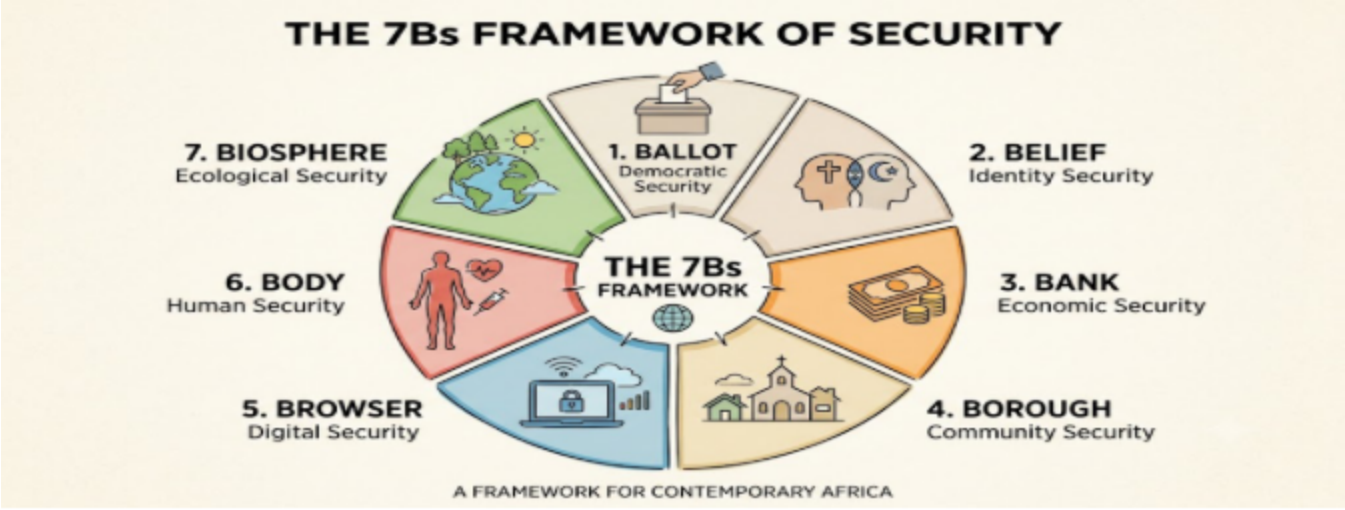

Figure 1

Fig. 1.1: The 7Bs Framework of Security

Source: Author's Design, December, 2025.

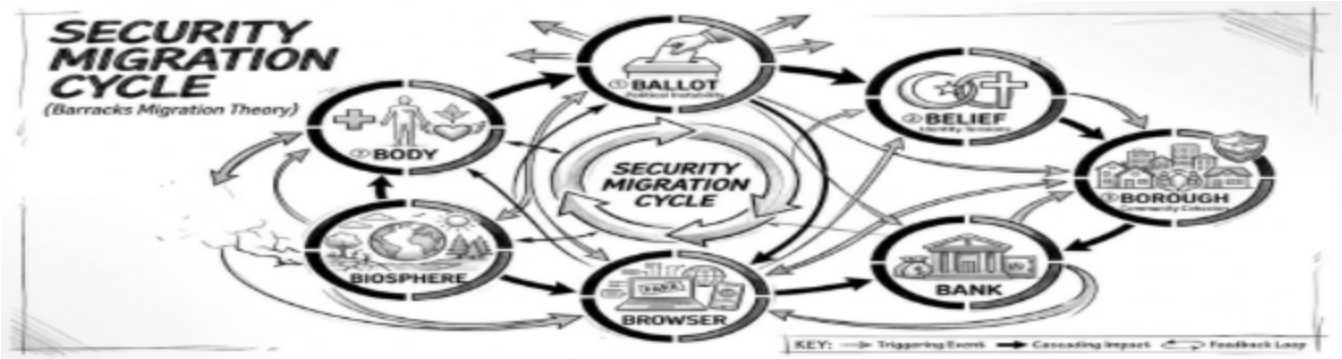

Figure 2

Fig. 1.2: Security Migration Cycle

Source: Author's Illustration, 2026.