

PERSPECTIVES ON SECURITY AND HUMANISTIC STUDIES

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Abstract

This paper explores the potential of linking security and humanistic studies as its primary goal and addresses contemporary security challenges in Africa and the world. This paper utilizes a qualitative research approach, drawing on existing literature from various disciplines such as political science, sociology, psychology, and history. Several key findings were identified. Firstly, security studies traditionally focus on state-centric, military-oriented approaches, often neglecting the broader human dimensions of security. Humanistic studies, on the other hand, emphasize the value of empathy, social justice, and individual agency. By combining these perspectives, a more comprehensive understanding of security can be achieved, one that addresses physical threats and considers social, economic, and cultural aspects, including areas of human needs. Secondly, the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing complex security challenges is also crucial. By bringing together experts from different disciplines, a holistic, eclectic, scientific approach can be developed, considering multiple factors and perspectives. This interdisciplinary approach is essential for understanding the root causes of security issues and formulating effective and sustainable solutions. Finally, the paper argues that linking security and humanistic studies can contribute to developing a more inclusive and human-centred security discourse. By prioritizing human well-being and dignity, a shift can be made from a state-centric approach to a people-centric approach, empowering individuals, and communities to actively participate in shaping their security. This paper makes a compelling case for linking security and humanistic studies to address contemporary security challenges in Africa and the world. By combining these disciplines, a more comprehensive understanding of security can be achieved, interdisciplinary collaboration can be fostered, and a more inclusive security discourse can be developed.

Keywords: Security discourse, systemic review, human-centred security, humanistic studies

Introduction

The main goal of this paper is to link security and humanistic studies. What is security and what is humanistic studies? Why should we and how do we link the concepts or disciplines? What are the possible paradigms for doing this? These are critical questions to approach the current trends of security challenges in Africa and the world. Multiple academic disciplines have a role to play in dealing

with the issues that are creating various threats. The world has evolved beyond the age of “knowledge for knowledge’s sake,” and scholars are expected to be development-relevant in their work by providing sustainable solutions to emerging or existing problems. More than ever, scholars are expected to be accountable for their research processes by providing evidence of the socio-economic relevance, benefits, and impact of their work. Humanistic studies have been slow and seem not to be ready to claim its expected space in development studies. This partly explains why the impact scores of the discipline are usually low on assessment platforms such as Google Scholar, Worldcat, JSTOR, etc., compared to those of other academic specializations. This current article argues that scholars in humanistic studies feature too marginally in security studies or affairs. Stakeholders requiring the services of experts must look in the direction of people from other academic specialisations in the scarcity of professionals with backgrounds in humanistic studies. This article is a scholarly inquiry into the problem and how the situation should be effectively redressed.

What constitutes security? There are many conceptualisations of the term, but as a point of departure, Security is freedom from fear and want and the presence of human dignity. Security is assured when these are present, and insecurity prevails when they are absent. However, the meaning of the term is easily affected by history, geography, and the changing human perception of realities. Overall, it first gained academic currency in the field of philosophy in reference to the exigencies of individual human survival. The meaning of the concept changed after the Second World War as it started to be applied to state survival under the bipolar logic of the Cold War. At the global level, it concerned the fear of humanity being wiped out by the possibility of nuclear warfare between the East and West. What it means further expanded at the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s with issues of human rights and protection of societal values and heritages starting to be given frontline attention in security considerations. This emphasis gave birth to some new security concepts such as societal security, human security, cultural security, political security, environmental security, international security, comprehensive security, homeland security and the like (Baldwin, 1997). As Jore (2019) argued, this period witnessed security now being “perceived as a shared responsibility covering different levels and sectors in society... in stark contrast to a few decades ago, when security was predominantly perceived as the responsibility of the police and army”. In this contemporaneous context, the term has been defined as “the perceived or actual ability to prepare for, adapt to, withstand and recover from dangers and crises caused by people’s deliberate, intentional and malicious activities such as terrorism, sabotage, organized crime, cyber-crime, etc.” (Jore, 2019:157).

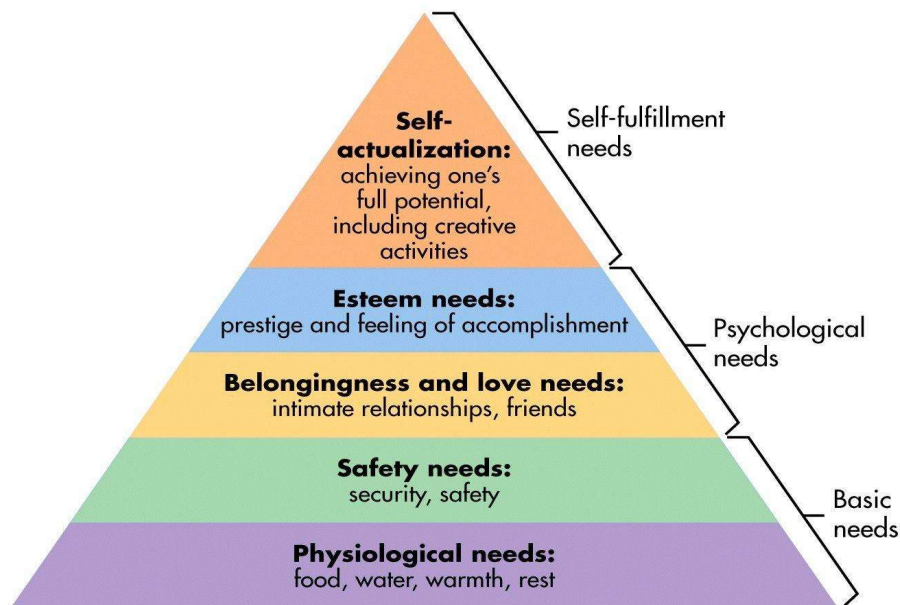
In other words, security now has to do with anything that could contribute to human dignity and happiness. It should be the concern of all academic disciplines.

How does humanistic studies come in? What is meant by humanistic studies? To the University of Humanistic Studies at Utrecht in the Netherlands, it “is an academic study that further elaborates the meaning and significance of humanism and worldviews within contemporary society.” It has also been defined as:

... an interdisciplinary program that will help students better understand what it means to be human through the study of history, literature, philosophy, religion, languages and world civilizations. Humanistic Studies explores some of the central questions in life, such as the meaning of beauty, justice, and the “good life,” as well as the importance of language, culture and artistic expression...The humanities comprise those fields that study human creations of all sorts, including literary studies, creative writing, linguistics, history, ancient and modern languages, cultural studies and philosophy” (University of Wisconsin).

The field of specialization helps students develop a greater understanding of what it means to be human through the study of history, literature, philosophy, religion, languages and world civilizations and explores questions central to life, such as the meaning of beauty, justice, and the “good life,” as well as the importance of language, culture and artistic expression. These values system readily links humanistic studies to the attainment of the five core human needs articulated by Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. The needs are:

Fig. 1: Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs



University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht, Netherlands,

The position of Abraham Maslow is that every living being has five basic needs: (1) physiological, (2) safety (3) belongingness or love, (4) self-esteem, and (5) self-actualization. The focus of humanistic studies is on how these needs could be met; this explains the “human” in the term. The theory asks questions around the problems associated with and the consequences of being unable to meet these needs. Disciplines in humanities such as linguistics and languages, literature, classics, archaeology, history, religion, philosophy, anthropology, law, as well as creative and performing arts—study aspects of these needs and the society and cultural environment within which they must be met using methods that are typically critical, speculative, and comparative.

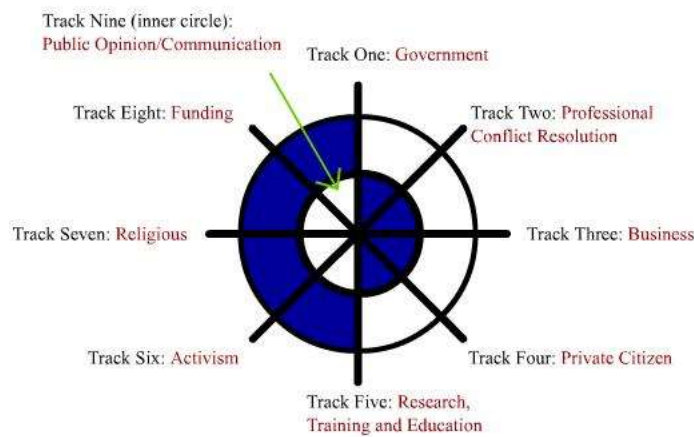
Security studies are linked to all aspects of these human needs, and this is well articulated by the human needs’ theory of conflict and peace. The argument here is that the more the basic needs of citizens are met, the more secure a society is. Conversely, societies that create little space for meeting human needs would have more conflict issues (Burton, 1988). To ensure that the global community gains more attention to meeting these needs, the concept of “human security” has been scientifically coined and promoted in the contemporary world. It was defined by UN General Assembly resolution 66/290 as “an approach to assist... in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of the people”.

The terminology calls for “people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people” (Marker, 2003) and focuses on three values: (i) freedom from want, (ii) freedom from fear, and (iii) respect for human dignity. In this context, the UN Commission for Human Security, founded in 2001, argues that human security means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people’s strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military, and cultural systems that will give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity together.” (Commission of Human Security, 2003:4). In other words, the concept of human security moves us away from the traditional, state-centric conceptions of security, which focus on the safety of states from military aggression to the realm of the security of the individuals and their need for protection and empowerment.

Human security calls notice to a people-centered approach to advancing peace, security, and development at the local, national and global levels of the political system. Doing so softens the study of threats, i.e., security. It promotes the “whole of society” approach to security management. By this, the article argues that all strata of society must have something unique to contribute to making peace possible. It is in this context that security management is now said to be a

multi-stakeholder problem that is everybody's business. The task should no longer be left to the state alone; it requires the contribution of the larger society. This line of thinking made the Institute of Multitrack Diplomacy in Washington (USA) frame what is today known as "multitrack diplomacy." Multitrack diplomacy suggests that security management should be approached from multiple points. In this regard, the Institute identified nine important stakeholders (technically labelled "tracks") needed for dealing with security challenges as shown below:

Fig. 2: Multitrack Diplomacy Matrix



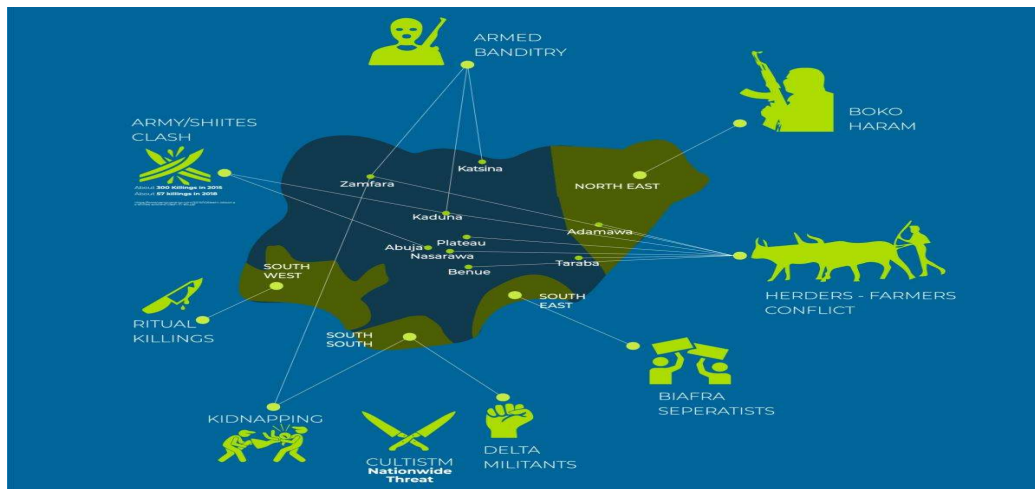
The tracks, as presented above, are Tracks (i) the government, (ii) civil society organisations, (iii) business organisations, (iv) prominent private citizens, (v) academic institutions, (vi) activists, (vii) religious organisations (viii) funding institutions, and (ix) the media. Each track could respond to security alone or in partnership with other tracks.

One of the most cross-cutting tracks is "track 5": research, training, and education. All the other tracks need it for building and growing its capacity. This is the core area in which security and humanistic studies are linked. Unfortunately, humanistic scholars do not perform well in security studies. Security studies are dominated by scholars in the core social sciences. Core social scientists are doing so well in the field because they have successfully used their knowledge and understanding of various aspects of society to ask security questions that concern people. Their contributions to peace studies and practice are "appropriated tools" from humanistic studies. By this, the article argues that they are constantly retraining and developing their capacities to perform roles and tasks that scholars in humanistic studies are unavailable to perform. Leading social scientists across the world are constantly improving, retraining, and acquiring new tools and knowledge for deepening their scholarship. For example,

in 2008, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and SEPHIS (Netherlands) contracted me as the convener of the Extended Social History Workshop on “Historicizing Migration.” The goal was to teach migration scholars from the social sciences how to use historical methods and make historians learn how to use social science methods to improve their academic outputs. The training took place at St. Louis, Senegal for three weeks from 3-21 March 2008. The project involved scholars from different parts of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America. In the process of this kind of opportunity to retrain scholars, several new forms of humanistic studies have developed and become popular around the world. These include digital humanities, humane science, medical humanities, humanistic psychology, critical humanities, and so on.

Several humanities-centered initiatives and programmes run globally to help bring more scholars from humanistic studies into development studies generally. However, many African scholars benefitting from these programmes return home with no new skills that enable them to catch up with the rapidly changing scholarly world of multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary studies. While fellowships and advertised projects could make scholars more global in their outlooks, their organizers or sponsors hardly mention disciplines but specific human problems to be solved. It could be violence, diseases, migration, environmental crisis, economic depression, etc. It is expected that the researcher applying to be part of such engagements would launch out from their disciplinary backgrounds and then connect with other disciplines to establish and strengthen the contributions to the knowledge they seek to make. The inability to do this well at the proposal writing level is automatically interpreted as a weakness and reason for not approving the application. This is a significant reason why humanistic scholars do badly in grantsmanship. Those recruiting scholars for security-related studies usually find proposals from scholars in the humanities that could be more impressive. This is why these scholars hardly feature in security intervention projects. Nevertheless, the security problems in West Africa and the Sahel are increasing daily and international efforts are being mobilised to intervene at various levels. Nigeria’s security problems increase regularly as presented in the following map produced in 2018 on the distribution of violent conflicts in Nigeria:

Figure 2: Map of Violent Conflicts in Nigeria (December 2018)



Source: Idayat Hassan, “From Boko to Biafra: How insecurity will affect Nigeria’s elections,” *African Arguments*, December 18, 2018, <https://africanarguments.org/2018/12/boko-biafra-nigeria-insecurity-2019-elections/>

The map shows that Nigeria's six geopolitical zones were bedeviled by one form of violence or the other as Nigeria approached the 2019 elections. The situation is worse today and there is no assurance that things will improve soon. As all areas of academic specialisation struggle to contribute to gaining a better understanding or solving these security problems, humanistic studies cannot continue to play the role of an onlooker, as is now evident. This becomes more worrisome as some of the consultants brought in from outside to help manage the Nigerian problems also belong to humanistic studies. At this point, this study is forced to ask: What is happening outside Nigeria that is absent in Nigeria? and how do we bridge this gap?

The first step for colleagues in the humanities is to start learning development scholarship to high levels of research. The contribution of humanistic studies to security management must be considered. What can these scholars contribute to managing more significant social, economic, political, and environmental problems? Humanistic scholars are now expected to move beyond their traditional training to start exploring other disciplines' methods and analytical tools, especially the social sciences. For example, those in history must use the tools of their colleagues in other disciplines, just as these other disciplines also rely on historical data or philosophical foundations. Scholars in migration history must learn from demography and social statistics, those in economic history must

understand economics for adequate scientific economic analysis and those in political history must easily understand what political scientists do.

The problem is that many want to remain what and where they were and still be accommodated by the rapidly changing academic world. Even in African Studies, our institutions could be doing better. Many high-impact journals have now stopped receiving papers from scholars who need help to update their knowledge. For example, *Africa Affairs*, a journal of over 120 years old Oxford Academic publication of the Royal African Society in the United Kingdom, expressly said: “African Affairs has moved away from publishing articles of purely historical interest. Articles with a historical focus should be relevant to contemporary concerns” (African Affairs). What is required now is for those examining the past to be development-relevant; they need to write in a manner that could enable the present gain from their investigation. Several other journals quietly reject papers that fail to show relevance or are considered mere storytelling or lacking analytical depth.

What is needed now to improve contributions from humanistic studies is an eclectic approach to social issues and the scientific analysis of data. Those teaching historiography, for example must critically work on this problem. Historians around the world now teach and benefit from “critical historiography” for updating research methods. It is no longer a matter of teaching students “History and the social sciences” and then quarreling with doctoral students attempting to apply social science methods to their data analysis. The future of these junior scholars is sometimes impeded by so doing. In other words, today’s historians should no longer approach the evidence at their disposal with a bowed head. The data must be critically interrogated using different analytical tools to get as close to the truth as possible. That is when what is written down could actually be applied to problem-solving, whether now or in the future. It is like a sick person being subjected to multiple laboratory tests to ascertain what happened and how the problems should be treated.

The Steps Forward

A scholar seeking to merge humanistic and security studies is being pushed into “public humanities.” It is a choice that must be carefully made because it is highly demanding and sometimes risky. Public humanities have to do with organizing knowledge production and knowledge outcomes with the concerns of the public at heart (Smulyan, 2020). It has to do with having to engage diverse publics with humanistic concerns. It is not a matter of “knowledge for knowledge’s sake” but knowledge for addressing prevailing developmental challenges in the society. In the context of the present paper, the main question answered by public humanities is, “How can humanistic studies” contribute to solving the mounting problems in our society? In our context, the question is

asked, “How can history, philosophy, linguistics and others help prevent Nigerian state from collapsing”? As the Public Humanities Hub, Faculty of Arts of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada observed, “... Public Humanities scholarship is ... about sharing one’s research with the general public through...’ “knowledge mobilization” ... When done well, Public Humanities foster knowledge exchange. It presumes both that Humanities researchers have valuable knowledge to share with diverse publics AND that those diverse publics have valuable insights to share with Humanities researchers through conversations, crowdsourcing projects, policy deliberations, performances, festivals, etc.”.

Relating public humanities to security studies involves the scholar producing the knowledge that could contribute meaningfully to security management. It is not just a matter of publishing for publishing’s sake but engaging in the kind of knowledge production that conflict managers find helpful in their work. There are two possibilities for those willing to come into the field: (i) the curriculum development approach and (ii) individual efforts. The curriculum-development approach has to do with the disciplines in the humanities seeing the need to contribute to development studies and may require adjusting their course contents and delivery in a manner that could enable students to engage with more public issues.

In this case, societal needs dictate what is taught and how they are taught. For example, the terrorists and violent extremists apprehended by security agencies in the Sahel and parts of West Africa tell stories about cross-border relationships that remind scholars of the collapsed Songhai, Mali, and Ghana empires. Soldiers and social scientists encounter several stories that historians are in the best position to make sense of but are hardly present in security studies. Irregular migrants going to Europe through North Africa have since “reopened” the defunct “trans-Saharan trade routes” to North Africa taught in undergraduate history classes. Studying how Nigerian missionaries take Christianity to all parts of the world now may sound more development-relevant and true to humanistic studies at this moment than still dissipating energies on how European missionaries came to Africa. This goes for many of the projects students work on these days. This is not to say that these issues are meaningless but that scholars need to contribute more towards investigating the development challenges in Africa. This is the age of “African solutions to African problems.” Not responding to this continental call by our academic practices would only make people and institutions continue to have lesser affection for the humanities. In other words, the curriculum of humanistic studies in Nigeria and many parts of Africa and what the scholars in the fields do need to be transformed. “Employability” and “development-relevance” is now the name of the “game”!

The second option is for things to remain as they are but for scholars willing to make contributions to security studies and other aspects of development studies to do all they can at the individual level toward becoming peace and security experts, most especially at the early stage in their career as I did. Immediately after completing my Ph.D. in 1994, I (re)trained in the U.S., U.K., Germany, France, Belgium, Finland, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, South Africa, and several other parts of the world to merge my knowledge of social history and security. Those seeking to follow this track now have avalanche of training and postdoc fellowship opportunities around the world to assist them. These fellowships are regularly announced. Evaluation of some of these proposals shows that they have too little “value addition” but evidence of inability to function beyond the doctoral training. Hence, they are rejected. Many of those who get the fellowships and use the knowledge well are offered juicy appointments that make them refuse to return home to train the others.

What has been the value added in my own experience? I use my knowledge of history to deepen the understanding of conflict and peace issues and several development organisations (the British Council, DFID, USAID, United Nations, African Union, ECOWAS, Commonwealth Office in London, the European Union, AFRICOM, etc.) have found my services extremely useful in this respect. Mistakes are prevented when development agencies and policymakers consult and work with historians. More than the consultancies, my transnational studies led to the peace and conflict studies programmes in University of Ibadan, University of Ilorin, University of Cape Coast (Ghana), Al-Hikmah University in Ilorin, and the Abubakar Abdulsalami Centre for Peace and Sustainable Studies, Minna. I help to monitor and evaluate other programmes across the African continent.

Several things must be done by a scholar seeking to merge humanistic and security studies. The first is readiness to publish in your mainstream discipline and then security studies, which is more multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary. Attaining this objective provides too little room for leisurely scholarship. Nevertheless, those who work painstakingly get easily recognised globally and often achieve high citation rankings or scores on Google Scholar, Worldcat, JSTOR, Academia and other global academic platforms. Professors Wole Soyinka and Niyi Osundare are perfect examples in this respect. Their politically piercing works (novels and poems) make them African models in public humanities. They write and speak on issues of profound public interest. In some cases, they collide with the government in the process. They are respected globally for being so academically innovative. The rapidly growing *Toyin Falola Interviews: Applying African Voices*, under which prominent Africans are interviewed and their voices digitised for posterity, is another important contribution to the global world of public humanities. In the years to come,

researchers would still go to such tapes to collect their data from those recorded. Siyan Oyeweso's "Yoruba Towns" is another emerging model in public humanities to be closely studied and followed by other humanistic scholars. These scholars lost their original training to create something new, innovative and development relevant. The works of remarkable scholars are bound to outlive them, which is what public humanities should be about. Providing ideas or solutions that will stand the test of time.

The emphasis of this paper is on security and humanistic studies. Linking the two may be more complex than the initiatives discussed above. The situation could be very challenging. A few scholars attempted to come into the field of security studies in Nigeria in the past but withdrew after struggling with one or two ideas. Security studies require high level of sensitivity, preparation and retraining that scholars could easily consider unnecessary diversion. Data must be collected, analysed, written up and the results disseminated under very circumspect conditions. Data collection could amount to "dangerous fieldwork," especially if the researcher must work in a violently divided society. The problems here include gaining access to the communities and maintaining one's safety there, gaining the needed trust for data collection, complying with requisite ethical standards, and interpreting the data. Papers written under these conditions could easily get the scholar into trouble with the government or belligerents. Each stakeholder could accuse the researcher of doing too little or too much. Hence, those coming to the field must be prepared for the risks and equip themselves with appropriate competences for efficient performance.

However, three things are expedient while launching out: (i) readiness to revisit one's epistemology (ii) research methodology, and (iii) work with theories. Epistemology concerns the nature of knowledge and how it is and should be produced or reproduced. In this respect, the researcher must be unequivocal about the aspects of security problems to focus on, why and how? Research methodology involves how to collect, analyse and use data. Theory, which is the third, is probably the most debatable. Some humanistic scholars are shy of using theories. Those coming to the field of security studies cannot sustain that kind of attitude; they must use theories. In this respect, a theory is "a set of related propositions that suggests why events occur in the manner they do" (Hoover, 1980, p. 37). This definition might not be deep enough, but it suffices for our purpose in this paper. Theories have four distinct uses in social scientific thinking:

1. Theory provides patterns for interpretation of data.
2. Theory links one study with another.
3. Theories supply frameworks within which concepts and variables acquire special significance.
4. Theory allows us to interpret the larger meaning of our findings for ourselves and others. (Hoover, 1980:39)

The space available for this paper does not allow us to thoroughly examine how each applies to the subject matter under consideration. However, the lesson to be drawn from the foregoing narrative is that many security theories exist. Those venturing into the field must know and can apply them actionably. It is apt to conclude this paper with the following quotes:

Society has never needed Humanities scholars' guidance more. We live in a time of crisis: climate change threatens the planet, fake news and extreme populism have put democracy at risk, and racism, war, and wealth disparities have made millions of people around the world incredibly vulnerable. Humanities scholars are a largely untapped resource that can expand public discussions and enrich public understandings beyond our current moment in ways that spark the imagination of different kinds of futures - (The University of British Columbia).

.... every facet of the humanities can imbue future cyber security experts with critically desired soft skills that help people work more effectively in tech environments. Of these skills, one of the most widely sought-after is empathetic interpersonal skills – understanding people and what motivates them – along with clear communication capabilities (writing and speaking effectively for the intended audience). (Morgan, 2021:13-16)

The modern world needs humanistic scholarship, as argued. Are they willing to retool for more effective participation in security studies, which is the primary concern of the present paper? This question must be answered at organisational and individual levels in line with the objectives of the conference where this paper was initially presented. The Faculty of Humanities of Osun State University could collaborate with the Peace and Conflict Studies programmes of the University of Ibadan to follow up on some of the issues addressed in this paper. That may be another innovative way to link security and humanistic studies. However, a more straightforward method is for the faculty to collaborate with the university's Faculty of Social Sciences to deal with the issues.

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