

Is Security “Civilising”, as Argued by Loader and Walker?

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Introduction

In their book “Civilizing Security” Loader and Walker argue that security can have an instrumental role in promoting a more democratic and broadly civilised relationship between individuals and between them and the state. This is thanks to the constitutive nature of security which makes it a producer and a product of social relations. Moreover they claim it is the necessary priority of the state to be the main entity in ensuring collective security. Thus, at the domestic level as well as the translational one, the state is still presented as the predominant matrix of security, albeit not the monopolist one. The end goal of the project of civilising security is to attain security in its axiomatic form, through the last stage of theory, anchored pluralism, which should allow a co-operation between states and other entities in guaranteeing security.

In this paper I will argue that Loader and Walker reveal a very interesting dynamic, in which they put citizens in a position to somehow educate the state, to secure themselves and avoid the state developing as a threat to them. However, I would say that they do not develop this notion far enough, and are subsequently unable to overcome the concept of the state as the main actor of security. Related to this I will briefly illustrate a lack of clarity in the dynamic of the actor-referent of security, and how the claim for the priority of the state does not help to explain it. Finally I will point out the weakness of the international dimension of the project of civilising security.

To do this I will outline the main assumptions of Loader and Walker’s theory. I will then show how the authors define security and where it is placed in the social context and why, in the authors’ opinion, the state must remain the matrix of collective security. I will explain how civilising security works internationally and finally I will illustrate how the authors, incorporating all the elements, reach the main goals of their project of civilising security. In conclusion, I will evaluate the main critiques found in the literature on the issue and I will expose my perspectives based on that literature.

1. Security Needs Civilizing, Security Is Civilizing

Loader and Walker’s project is based on two main assumptions. The first is that security *needs* civilizing. States have a monopoly over the physical and symbolic use of coercive power. This gives states, even the most liberal and democratic, the capacity to be a major threat to the fundamental rights and liberties of democracy, in their pursuit of collective security. To avoid this paradox, and to exploit all its advantages, the state itself must be civilised. The second and most important assumption, is that security *is* civilizing. Individuals living in a state of fear or anxiety are not good democratic citizens; they do not properly care for liberties and rights and they are afraid of the unknown. In this sociological sense Loader and Walker define security as a *thick public good*: security is the producer and the product of forms of trust and solidarity which are a prerequisite for democratic society. For this reason, in the authors’ opinion, individuals are the moral units and the referents of security^[1].

Thus, the state should be educated through a rigid democratic scrutiny and legal control of its capacity to use physical and symbolic force. More precisely, Loader and Walker argue to deal with that state’s deficiencies in some

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aspect of society, that allow the presence of fear and anxiety. This is confirmed by the birth of many non-state actors which aim to guarantee individuals security in those fields where the state is absent^[2]. However to remedy this, Loader and Walker do not suggest a new actor, different from the failing previous one; but rather, they suggest a shift from the traditional negative view of the state to a more benign one, able to underscore the positive virtue of the state, and the necessity of its priority^[3].

2. Security as a Constitutive Public Good

The foundations of Loader and Walker’s theory are in the social background of security, where it is represented as a thick public good.

The first and very basic social aspect of security emphasised, concerns the outcomes of the enjoyment of security and of the liberties which are obtained through it. Therefore the cause-effect relationship triggered by security at the social level is, according to Loader and Walker, the most important instrument that gives a social community the possibility of achieving any kind of common good^[4].

Nevertheless, security is not only this. In fact the authors argue that security is a social good, also because the only way in which people can experience it is through a social relationship. This represents the first step to introducing security as a constitutive good: in this sense, security is not just the product of a social relationship, but is inter-subjectively constituted. Therefore they argue that individuals are aware that their own security relies on the security of the other members of the same community. This leads them to think that the best way to achieve their own personal security is to guarantee the others’. In this sense Loader and Walker suggest that individuals, having recognised this dynamic of mutual dependence, can be educated into security altruism^[5].

Thus, this wish for security becomes instrumental to the shaping of the collective security, demonstrating all the public and constitutive nature of the good of security^[6]. However, at the same time the authors introduce an ill defined idea of “*system of public provision*”^[7], that takes the lead on all other entities to ensure collective security.

3. The Priority of the State

Even though a system of public provision is not well defined in security terms, Loader and Walker’s clear intention to reaffirm the positive virtue of the state in ensuring security, could lead to identify this system with the state itself.

The reason to have an entity stronger than the others is for achieving the main fundamental tasks to ensure collective security. These tasks – identification, resource mobilisation and allocation, deliberation, regulation and commitment – are generally defined as “*indispensable to the public good of security*”, as a separate concept as well as aggregated, whose value rests on mutual dependence and support among every single task. Because of this complexity of inter-action, the authors argue that the only entity able to completely fulfil these requirements is the state, for three different reasons. First, given that every single task is necessary, each one must be performed; therefore only the state can take this charge upon itself. Secondly, as they are inter-connected and working as a system, a certain level of co-ordination is needed to perform all these tasks, not only individually but also as one single body. Third, there is a matter of capacity: all these tasks cover a very wide range of fields and issues of a social community, which only the state can cover^[8].

Indeed Loader and Walker clarify that this does not necessarily mean that states will be the monopolist in pursuing these tasks, but it must have precedence over any other entities^[9].

4. Security as a Global Public Good

Loader and Walker extend their notion of security as a public good also to the global level. According to Kaul et al., global goods in general share the same characteristics as domestic ones, but their outcomes are extended on a global level and through time. Loader and Walker adopt this definition introducing some difference in its relationship dynamic, but not at the very foundations of the notion itself. The first assumption of this idea is that, in their opinion,

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states are aware of the interdependent relationship which links their respective security, and will adopt co-operative strategies in order to achieve their own internal security^[10]. This is because of the convictions that the presence of other states does not represent a traditional external threat, but rather that different domestic security agendas negatively affect the development and the pursuit of the inner security of another state. Nonetheless, this mutual intrusion into domestic policy brings the advantage of sharing fears and, consequently, the instruments required to face them. This dynamic makes it impossible to achieve only one state's domestic security, leading states to work together to reach a respective and mutually linked domestic security^[11].

The only real international reference made by the authors, is to some poorly define a notion of *Influential regional and global fora*”, which should give voice to all those people who do not think only in states' terms and are then able to present an alternative way to achieve global security^[12].

5. Axiomatic Security and Anchored Pluralism

The previous sections have shown the main steps which lead Loader and Walker to the last stage of their theory: axiomatic security and anchored pluralism.

Once it is stated and explained that security is a thick public good, they pose this notion at the roots of their idea of security as an *axiomatic* element of social relations. This is possible by virtue of a security constitutive aspect, that makes security necessary, for the civilising security project, for any kind of democratic political community. Moreover security is instrumental in educating society and the state for achieving collective security. Loader and Walker pointed out these characteristics as axiomatic of security, arguing that the good of security is when it is pursued at its ontological and instrumental level, namely its axiomatic characteristics. In contrast they suggest that it becomes harmfully pervasive when it is deep and narrowed in all the aspects of society's life^[13].

To avoid this harmful dynamic, the entities entitled to ensure collective security, namely the state, *must ensure*” the *anchored pluralism*. The state, in Loader and Walker's opinion, must remain the anchor of collective security, but should allow a certain measure of pluralism. Internally in terms of democratic rights of inclusiveness, representativeness and protection of minorities and individuals; externally by the recognition of other entities legitimacy and authority of regulatory production as an alternative to the state^[14].

For the authors the domestic system based on these two concepts is also suitable for the global level of security. At the transnational level in fact, the source of common actions should still be, they argue, the state; but the existence of a second level of political community should be recognised, the global one precisely, where the concept of security as thick public good is different from the domestic one. Must be registered the presence and the work of the above mentioned global fora here.

6. Is then Security Civilizing?

Loader and Walker's theory of the project of civilising security, whose main features have been described above, shows some potentially interesting points and deficiencies and weaknesses.

Clearly individuals play a prominent role in civilising the state, for I would say it is important to understand how they do it. In the project of civilising security's liberal-democracy model background, legality should be the harness of state's coercive power. According to Huysmans the exercise of coercive power is a tension between the state and individuals. Then I would argue that putting all the civilising power of security into individuals hands, as Loader and Walker do, might to some extent be a threat itself. In fact individuals are often lead by very emotional, not to say irrational, feelings, that do not have all those checks and balances guaranteed by the legal system.

I would define Loader and Walker's idea that citizens can take back the state for themselves and decide for their own security, as an interesting one. Especially nowadays, society has reached levels of autonomous organisation which allows groups of people to exercise a real power on more structured entities like the states, whose aspects are briefly touched on by Boal et al. in their book “*Afflicted Powers*”^[15].

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However this leads me to raise the question of who is the subject of security. Taking the Copenhagen School as a theoretical framework, the referent object is the entity which is somehow existentially threatened and the actor is the one that securitizes issues by declaring a referent object^[16]. Far from applying categories evidently unsuitable to each other, the comparison is useful to understand how, in the project of civilising security, individuals and the state are changing places. First the former educates the latter and then the latter ensures the security of the former. Here it seems to me that as Buzan pointed out individuals are the irreducible base units of security^[17], but they cannot be the referent object. Loader and Walker are not able to overcome this stage. They leave some room for individuals at the very early stage, but at the end they fall again within the state-centred framework. Therefore I would argue that, claiming for collective security as they do but not being able to recognise individuals as the subject of security, the authors do, as R. B. J. Walker puts it, “*little more than to fudge the contradiction that is written right into the heart of modern politics*”^[18]. In other words, we can be many things, but we cannot not be human beings. That is why, agreeing with Cox that “*theory is always and for someone and for some purpose*”^[19], the authors’ lack of clarity on this point, does not allow me to track a well defined path of this dynamic in their theory.

Indeed, a way to develop further this argument is shown by Aradau, who claims for a “*process of re-thinking between subjects of security*” that would not be subdued to any threat based on fear or anxiety, asking for an emancipation against the state to achieve equal rights for all individuals^[20]. Although I would not necessarily entirely agree with Aradau’s point of view, I would welcome a deeper analysis of the role of individuals’ action towards the state in the civilising security project, if only to understand if it were possible to frame it at least into the definition of emancipation stated by Booth^[21].

The priority of the state makes it even more complicated to understand this important tension in security. In particular it raises some doubts concerning the identification task. The authors say that historically states have played a very important role in developing a feeling of belonging into individuals and that, through history, states have often shown their effectiveness in achieving security that “*must be recognised*”^[22]. I would argue that such an explanation risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, stating that it must be the state because historically it has always been the state.

With reference to the global aspects, all the attention paid to the domestic facet of security and of its dynamic, let me now turn to the lack of a real international dimension of this theory. It seems here that Loader and Walker focus only on what Campbell has defined *Foreign Policy*: to build your own identity through the interpretation of dangers posed by the others. Whereas the *foreign policy* is totally missing, the dynamics through which relations with states are managed^[23], as there are no relations between states on a common level outside their borders, given that everything is internalised on the domestic arena.

Finally, starting from the Eurocentrism critique generally addressed to the Critical Security Studies by R. B. J. Walker^[24], Behnke^[25] and Salter^[26], I would like to underscore a different meaning of it. In this sense, given the close connection between Europe and liberal-democracies, I would broaden it to well-working-democracycentrism. In a sense that Loader and Walker’s theory relies too much on the background of the liberal-democracy system, implicitly excluding the problem of security in all those countries which are not democratic ones, or not democratic enough.

Conclusion

In the first sections of this paper I have shown what I found to be the most important characteristics of Loader and Walker’s project for civilising security. I briefly discussed the interesting aspects of it as well as what the background literature identified as uncertainties. I underlined the main assumptions that provided the foundations of the theory, as the concept of security as a constitutive public good, the virtue of the state and the necessity of its priority in ensuring collective security, as well as the individuals’ role in educating the state, the last of which I would define as the most interesting ideas of the whole theory. I have illustrated how they work together to achieve the final targets of the project, the notion of axiomatic security and anchored pluralism.

To conclude this short essay I consider it useful to frame these ideas in the wider context of security in International Relations theory. Loader and Walker’s civilising security in fact, is a clear contribution to the main debate on security, that outlines several interesting points. Compared to the other main critical literature it is interesting how Loader and

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Walker represent a point between the Copenhagen School and schools of thought that claim the disappearance of the state. They in fact argue the priority of the state but only after having been educated by individuals, an idea that, if better developed, in my opinion could allow avoidance of the so-called *security trap* problem, whose three main aspects, are all connected to the state's role in the (in)securization process^[27].

Furthermore, they elaborate the notion of security as a common public and socially constructed good in an original way, which introduces an idea of security emanating from the community, with an instrumental function that is at the same time far from Buzan, Weaver and De Wilde's securitization and speech act^[28], as well as from the concept of emancipation of the Welsh^[29] and Paris^[30] school.

However their focus is very much centred on the domestic domain; a choice that can denote a certain originality but that, at the same time, exposes a weak theorisation of the international and global dimension of the whole project. In this sense, reframing how this theory suggests interesting points on the discourse about security, in most of its sections it is lacking a strong theoretical framework. I would say that, compared to the main literature on security, Loader and Walker's concepts, are sometimes not deeply investigated or not completely developed.

This reinforces my conviction that a deeper analysis and reflection on the aforementioned ideas, which this paper could not and was not intended to offer, might help to better develop the potential civilising effect of security that Loader and Walker seem not being able to come alive.

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