

Identity and security: Buzan and the Copenhagen school*

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Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester, 2nd edn, 1991

Ole Waever et al. (eds.), *European Polyphony: Perspectives beyond East West Confrontation*, London, Macmillan, 1990

Barry Buzan et al., *The European Security Order Recast: Scenarios for the Post-Cold War Era*, London, Pinter, 1990

Ole Waever et al., *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*, London, Pinter, 1993

Since the publication in 1983 of the first edition of *People, States and Fear*, Barry Buzan's work has established itself—for European scholars, at least—as the canon and indispensable reference point for students of security. His book and the revisions of the second edition (1991) have been the stimulus for further exploration of the security problem at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Research in Copenhagen. Together with Buzan, the collaborators have produced several publications on the security theme, sufficiently interrelated to warrant the collective shorthand, the 'Copenhagen school' of security studies.

The revision of security studies, which Buzan announced in 1983, has taken a new turn with a recent publication by the Copenhagen school. The need to refine the concept of security and to focus greater attention on 'social identity' appears to have emerged more from the pressure of events suggesting a move in this direction than from particular doubts previously expressed at the theoretical level. With Buzan as a principal contributor, the new thinking is set out in the recent publication of Waever et al.¹ Since Buzan has shared authorship of a new direction of his initial project, it merits scrupulous attention by all who have spent the last decade reading and teaching *People, States and Fear* and, in Ken Booth's words, 'writing footnotes to it'.²

At first glance, the new emphasis on society and identity answers the main body of criticism levelled at Buzan's inability, arising from his conceptual model giving

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¹ *Identity, Migration*. To avoid confusion due to common authorship, the authors of this book will be referred to in the text as Waever et al. Similarly, Buzan (1991) will distinguish Buzan's authorship of the second edition of *People, States and Fear*.

² Ken Booth, 'Security and Emancipation', *Review of International Studies*, 17 (1991), pp. 313–26.

ontological primacy to the state, to accord significance or autonomy to human beings as an object of security and to the sub-state groups to which they belong.³ His collaboration in the abandonment of state primacy shifts the weight of his contribution to security studies—and his reputation—to this later joint publication.

Another factor that will contribute to its appeal and influence is its focus on societal identity as the core value vulnerable to threats and in need of security. Identity had been a fashionable preoccupation of social scientists for many decades prior to its emergence in the media as the major cause of upheaval in central and eastern Europe and the source of resistance to integration in the European Union. Waever et al. have thus given an old idea a new angle in discourse on international affairs. Identity is a good thing, with a human face and ephemeral character which make it at once appealing and difficult to grasp. From the pens of scholars who aim to situate their work in the neorealist tradition, it betokens a break with the image of that hard-bitten class which formerly consigned identity to the category of soft concepts suitable for novelists and sociologists.

The analysis of collective identity can be approached from a deconstructionist, sociological angle, which focuses on the processes and practices by which people and groups construct their self-image. Or it can be approached from the more common objectivist viewpoint, similar to that adopted in respect of the state in Buzan (1991). Waever et al. appear unsure and to want to have a foot in each camp. The discussion setting out their basic approach is obscured by uneven and sometimes slippery language, suggesting some doubts as to the force of their argument and the degree of continuity of approach with Buzan (1991). There are passages that suggest the deconstructionist agenda, but these are radically at odds with the bulk of the work which remains firmly objectivist, indeed realist.

In this paper, I examine critically the authors' central concepts of society and societal security, and offer an alternative understanding of identity which has implications for security. Finally, an assessment will be made of the continuity of Waever et al. with the seminal work of Buzan.

Society and societal security

The societal dimension which was subordinated to the state in *People, States and Fear*, is retained by Waever et al. as a sector of the state, but also given a new status as an object of security in its own right. There is now 'a duality of state security and societal security, the former having sovereignty as its ultimate criterion, and the latter being held together by concerns about identity'.⁴

This elevation of society to the level of an independent object of security is the major shift in thinking which provides the core of the argument. It is the security of society, as distinct from that of the state, and in interaction with it, which focuses attention throughout. What is meant by 'society' and 'societal security'?

It is clear that the term 'society' is not meant to connote a process of negotiation,

³ Ibid.; Steve Smith, 'Mature Anarchy, Strong States and Security', in *Arms Control*, 12 (1991), pp. 325–39; Martin Shaw, 'There is no such Thing as Society: Beyond Individualism and Statism in International Security Studies', in *Review of International Studies*, 19 (1993), pp. 159–75.

⁴ Waever et al., *Identity, Migration*, p. 25.

affirmation and reproduction, or even to embrace the 'system of interrelationships which connects together the individuals who share a common culture', in a more traditional sociological formula.⁵ Such a definition leaves as an open question the extent to which individuals *in fact* share a common culture. Waever et al. prefer a less fluid reality: 'a clustering of institutions combined with a feeling of common identity'.⁶ It is an objectivist, Durkheimian conception, as they acknowledge. In fact, throughout the book, their concept of society loses all touch with fluidity and process, resulting in a near-positivist conception of identity.

The key to society is that set of ideas and practices that identify individuals as members of a social group. *Society is about identity*, about the self conception of communities and of individuals identifying themselves as members of a community.⁷

In a more telling passage by a different co-author, we are left in no doubt that the value to be secured under the rubric of 'societal security' is societal identity:

If it is societies that are the central focus of this new security problematique, then it is the issues of identity and migration that drive the underlying perceptions of threats and vulnerabilities. Societies are *fundamentally about identity*.⁸

The point is laboured: 'societal security concerns the ability of a society to persist *in its essential character* under changing conditions . . .'⁹ Both 'society' and 'identity' are here projected as objective realities, out there to be discovered and analyzed. If, then, 'the purpose of this book is to examine the agenda of societal insecurity', we can take it that other components of society, and other values which that collectivity of individuals and social groups hold in esteem, are of little significance to the task in hand.

The authors are clear that the intention is not to humanize the concept of security in line with 'those theorists whose search for an alternative to state security leads them to individual security . . .'¹⁰ The reason that individuals and social groups are not the object of the study is similar to that given in Buzan (1991): if we are to avoid methodological individualism, we must treat society as a 'reality of its own', in Durkheimian fashion, 'not to be reduced to the individual level'.¹¹

Who speaks for the state? The question which poses itself in relation to the state-centric approach of *People, States and Fear* arises with renewed force in the new formulation of the problem: Who speaks for society? 'Whose security?' now leads back to a prior question: 'Whose identity is to be secured?' To their credit, the authors raise the same question themselves in presenting some counter-arguments to their approach in their final chapter. Referring to the legitimacy of societal security claims, they acknowledge:

Anyone can speak on behalf of society, claiming that a security problem has appeared. When should this be taken seriously?¹²

⁵ Anthony Giddens, *Sociology* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 32.

⁶ Waever et al., *Identity, Migration*, p. 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24 (emphasis added).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6 (emphasis added).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18; Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, pp. 35ff.

¹² Waever et al., *Identity, Migration*, p. 187.

It depends on what they mean by ‘seriously’. There are three different stages in interpreting identity claims and taking them ‘seriously’ with respect to security. The first two are the familiar, strictly empirical, problems relating to the extent and intensity of beliefs. The third is more a philosophical problem, which will be addressed below. It suffices for the moment to note that the authors never move beyond the first stage and seldom address even that as a serious problem. Their work begins and remains at a level of reification which excludes discussion of these questions of process. Even allowing that they work on a very wide canvas where detail is inevitably sacrificed to the overall picture, the general lack of concern with these fundamental methodological questions is disturbing. It shows in the ambiguity of their thesis.

In a puzzling retrospective comment, the authors reject the charge of reification on the grounds that their main interest is not in what increases or decreases security, but in the process of defining security threats.¹³ But this and similar reflections are far from clear, are contradicted by several others, and are impossible to match with the treatment of ‘society’ and ‘identity’ in the book they have actually written. They would appear to undermine the authors’ entire work. If they were truly concerned with the process of social construction, they could not regard society as ‘a social agent which has an independent reality’¹⁴ (as they do) and they would have to conduct the analysis at the sub-social level (which they emphatically reject). Despite the disclaimers, they do in fact view society as an ‘independent variable’,¹⁵ a social fact immune to process inquiry, whose values and vulnerabilities are as objective as those of the state.

Their response to their own question as to when security claims (and this implies identity claims) should be taken seriously is, unhelpfully, ‘In hindsight’. Only hindsight will reveal ‘how much legitimacy an actor does have when trying to speak on behalf of society . . . [Actors] become consequential on a political scale only when society actively backs them up . . .’¹⁶ Whether in hindsight or in foresight, the problem remains the rudimentary one of our conception of society as process or as object. How do we know when *society* ‘actively backs them up’? We cannot unravel the concept of society in action by appealing to the same problematic concept in hindsight.

The problem of identity

We must ask why the authors choose identity from among the countless values which people are concerned about and which can be attributed to the collectivity of society, thus coming under the umbrella of ‘societal security’. It is clear that ‘societal security’ is the object of an *assumption* about its referent, not the object of inquiry. That would entail an inquiry into which of the indeterminate values susceptible to threat—including identity—may be vulnerable and require security. A society’s

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

survival *is* a matter of identity, they assert. No evidence or argument is offered in support, other than the comment that ‘this is the way a society talks about existential threats: if this happens, we will no longer be able to live as “us”’.¹⁷ This observation is made analytically true, of course, if we accept the definition of society in terms of ‘individuals identifying themselves as members of a community’.¹⁸ But that is to reduce our conception of society to its most ephemeral and empirically contentious component and to ignore other elements.

The authors briefly acknowledge that economic threats to particular groups within a society can affect the security of society as a whole.¹⁹ But this passing interest in the multi-dimensionality of threats is not sustained. Neither does it reflect interest in the multi-dimensionality of *values* susceptible to threat. The only value which they can conceive as vulnerable in the event of economic threats is societal identity.

If, rather than assuming that identity is the unique value vulnerable to threat, the authors had posed as a problem, ‘What is the focus of the security concerns of the people who comprise “society”?’ the intuitive evidence alone would have suggested a range of values, with economic welfare prominent. This would force the level of analysis down from society as a whole to its social-group components. That would open up not just a methodological can of worms for the authors—as they realize²⁰—but a theoretical one also. Their focus on the domestic dimension of the security problem could no longer remain at the macro-level of society, and a new conceptual schema would be required to deal with the dynamics of sub-societal, societal and state interaction. This would have resulted in a quite different approach, in which the apparent fact of societal identity was exposed as an integral, political aspect of the security problem, rather than a taken-for-granted reality which defined the problem.

Identity is not a fact of society; it is a process of negotiation among people and interest groups. Being English, Irish, Danish is a consequence of a political process, and it is that process, not the label symbolizing it, which constitutes the reality that needs explication. We cannot decide the status, or even the relevance, of identity *a priori*. Where it is relevant, it is not necessarily the cause of a security problem, as the authors assume. It is just as likely to be its effect. Which it is can only be revealed by deconstructing the process of identity formation at the sub-societal level, but the authors reject this approach as leading inevitably to individualism. The security problem in the Russian Federation, former Yugoslavia, or Northern Ireland is not there just *because* people have separate identities; it may well be that they have separate identities because of the security problem. Contrary to the authors’ claim,²¹ identity is not to be taken as an independent variable, *tout court*; it is often the outcome of a labelling process which reflects a conflict of interests at the political level.

We get some sense of the applicability of the authors’ theoretical approach to identity and security in the case-studies which form the bulk of Waever et al. and which comment interestingly on European integration, migration, the Middle East,

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

²¹ Ibid., p. 185.

the former Soviet Union and other areas of conflict. A brief examination of one of these studies, which is representative of the approach of all, is instructive.²²

Most of the story is a straightforward, albeit excellent, piece of traditional political science, giving customary attention to state actors and employing a familiar shorthand of ethnic labels for political leadership, which we have no difficulty in translating. 'Kosovo Albanians repeated their 1968 demand for a republic', 'the Serbs insisted on living together', 'the Croats finally recovered their own state', and so on.²³ This is vintage security analysis without pretension to broader concepts or sociological deconstruction. The question does not arise, since throughout most of the chapter the author pays little attention to the new focus on identity to which his contribution has been recruited; indeed he scarcely mentions the word.

The concept of identity makes its appearance in a few pages of conclusion where Hakan Wiberg reflects on his own analysis in the light of the theoretical agenda of the principal authors. Despite the lack of evidence, he asserts that the conflict is really about the twin concepts of identity and the state²⁴—defined as objects of security by the principal authors, even though his analysis has touched, *inter alia*, on economic deprivation among urban workers, and has nowhere shown how collective identity was constructed and articulated. Among several unsupported claims to illustrate this point, he states that the secessions of Croatia and Bosnia 'would be seen by Serbs there as identity threats . . . as deadly threats to the security of the Serb communities . . .'²⁵ And again: 'The identity problem can be succinctly described by recalling that Macedonia is surrounded by Bulgaria . . .'²⁶

Would that it were so easy! This is one example of the manner in which most of the case-studies are approached in a traditional way and then overlaid with the identity thesis. There is nothing in this case-study to support the identity thesis of the principal authors, unless it be the reification of identity itself. The opportunity is missed to explore the extent to which Yugoslavia, far from exemplifying the autonomy of identity as a social fact, is perhaps an outstanding example of the manipulation of identity by political élites in an area remarkable for its historical forgetfulness.

Identity and moral judgment

The human and moral connotations of identity give it a popular appeal. Its apparent subjectivity makes everyone an expert. Its fundamental character as an inalienable human property blocks all criticism and makes its secure possession a matter of elementary justice. We are who we think we are; no one else can judge us.

Though Waever et al. would reject this popular notion as the basis for their understanding of collective identity, their thesis, paradoxically, commits them to the same relativism. In effect they have an objectivist theory with relativist consequences.

²² Hakan Wiberg, 'Societal Security and the Explosion of Yugoslavia', in Waever et al., *Identity, Migration*, ch. 5, pp. 93–109.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 101, 98.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

In their view, identity is a property of society, not to be confused with human beings. It ‘emerges’ (a frequently used term) from the peculiar interactions of people and institutions in each society, fixed and incorrigible like the computer output of a complex arithmetic. Identity describes the society, and society is constituted by identity. Since its computation or construction does not crucially depend on human decisions, it makes no sense to speak of correcting it. Societal identity just is. We are stuck with it. There is no way we can replace it, except by adopting multiple identities, each of which is, in principle, as inviolable as the next.²⁷ It follows that we are stuck with every other community’s account of its identity also, and have no intellectual means of passing judgment on these accounts. We may not like who they are, but if they think that way, so be it.

This aspect of the identity thesis is disturbing because of its implications for security policy in general and for particular security issues in Europe. It lies at the other extreme to racism. The one view claims to judge races and to allocate each a position in an ontological hierarchy. The other refuses all judgment and allocates to each society an objective identity proper to it. Fortunately, there is more to be said about it than just to disapprove.

Perception and decision

Collective identity and security share a similar dependence on subjective awareness and the need for objective verification. Collective identity is first a matter of perception, just as security and insecurity also begin in our perception of vulnerabilities and threats. A critical difference appears, however, when we consider that the perception and fear of threats to security can, in principle, be checked by observing and evaluating the facts external to the subject. To privilege perception would, in effect, turn security policy over to demagogues and paranoiacs. It is plainly critical for security, both that we take perceptions seriously and that we have some criteria for correcting them, for assessing their objectivity. Paranoia, or complacency, can be challenged by evidence.

There seems to be no parallel in regard to identity. There is no court of appeal that can perform the same scholarly task for our sense of identity, personal or collective. The authors acknowledge part of the problem in their concluding reflections.²⁸ They see that not everyone who claims to articulate the identity of a society must thereby be accepted as an authority. In other words, they recognize that there may be an empirical problem. Their choice of examples to illustrate this—fascism, racism, xenophobia—hints at awareness of a deeper, normative problem,²⁹ but the discussion is not extended to explore it. When a claim is made about collective identity, their solution is to wait until hindsight reveals the truth.³⁰

But what kind of ‘truth’ could it reveal? What if Le Pen manages to manufacture

²⁷ Though the authors raise the question, ‘When (if ever) can national identity be replaced by another identity?’ (p. 28), the only discussion of this possibility concerns the overlaying of a European on a national identity. *Ibid.*, ch. 4; see also Buzan et al., *European Security Order*, pp. 36ff.

²⁸ Waever et al., *Identity, Migration*, pp. 187–9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

a majority consent, verified by polls or other measurement techniques, around the idea of racism and xenophobia, or if the IRA creates a 'collective identity' which incorporates intense anti-British sentiment into a symbol of Irish solidarity? Such hypothetical developments are not wildly improbable, and would immediately present a serious *security* problem in France and Ireland. From the traditional security point of view, the state would intervene and speak objective security for the society. This means that the racist perception of security would be countered by a decision of the state and a policy strategy to implement it.

Prior to settling the security problem in this manner, however, there is the more basic epistemological task of 'correcting' the identity claims which gave rise to it, the task of speaking 'objective' identity for the society. Who will judge what counts as the parameters of collective identity, and by what criteria must be judgment be made? Not to arbitrate is to abandon the problem and leave its resolution to the state or to the anarchic struggle of the most powerful interests.

Waever et al. offer no basis or criteria for arbitration between competing identity claims. Faced with the fact that identity disputes are a special case, not susceptible to objective resolution by empirical observation, they conclude, in effect, that such disputes are beyond all resolution. Their case-studies, their style and their apparent intention stand solidly within a theoretical tradition not noted for its affinity with relativism. Ironically, their solution to this problem of identity disputes—or rather their failure to offer any solution to it—leaves them, and us, in something of a postmodernist maze. The problem of resolving disputes about identity is, at root, a philosophical one in which moral judgment inescapably intrudes.

Parallel with freedom

An analogy between identity and individual freedom will serve to illustrate the point. The test of freedom cannot be reduced to a test of the absence of obstacles to the fulfilment of desires. By that criterion, a happy slave might be judged free and a frustrated professor enslaved. Neither can it be reduced to perception. The slave may perceive himself more free than the professor, but it is obvious that the concept of personal freedom loses the meaning we invest in it, if we limit it to the perception of either.

We need a test to judge the needs which are relevant to personal freedom if we are to rescue the concept from being merely an expression of taste. The test of freedom must begin from a positive judgment about human needs and rights, not from a negative assessment of obstacles. The philosophical starting-point must be some ideal of human nature.³¹ The fact that we have no authoritative, epistemological basis for constructing such an ideal is no argument against its necessity. We can, and we routinely do, make judgments about personal freedom. But they are not judgments which can be validated by empirical observation alone.

If we want a test allowing us to transcend individual perception and to judge

³¹ See the discussion of personal freedom, from which this analogy is drawn, in Martin Hollis, *Invitation to Philosophy* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 138ff.

personal freedom in the light of the human competence to which the concept refers, then we are in the business of making a moral decision. We stand some chance of making a more reasoned judgment if we address its normative character explicitly than if we hide it from view behind a veil of false respect for the authenticity of the person.

The implication for personal and collective identity should be clear. The basis of judgment about personal identity overlaps closely with the judgment about personal freedom. The answer to the question 'Who am I?' clearly does not rest simply on empirical evidence, though the factual, historical data collected in our passport, our diary and our past experiences are very relevant. Neither can it be decided exclusively in terms of subjective perception. We routinely 'correct' the identity claims not only of others but of ourselves. It rests also on the contrast and balance between a normative view of human nature and the facts of personal biography. It entails an element of decision as well as self-observation.

Similarly, the collective question, 'Who are we?' cannot be answered simply by reference to opinion polls, ancient myths, folk music or other measures of collective history. It too entails a decision based on a theory which relates some of the countless biographical facts of our collective past and present to a view of who we want to be. 'We are who we choose to be' overstates our freedom in the matter but makes the point forcefully that collective identity is a choice made by people, not a property of society which transcends their agency.

We *choose* from an array of possible identities, so to speak. (Clearly, this is to analyze identity formation in the abstract. No society exists where we could observe this process from the starting-point of a *tabula rasa* without an already-existing identity and the consequent pressures of socialization to adopt and to affirm it.) The question is how these diverse individual choices come to cohere in a clear or vague collective image, and how disputes about identity, with security implications, are settled. If we reify the notion of societal identity, in the manner of Waever et al., the answer is that it just happens. If sub-societal groups see things differently from the majority, Waever et al. offer no criteria by which to judge and resolve the dispute. For them, society *has* an identity by definition. People do not choose it; they recognize it, they *belong* to it.³²

This is sociologically untenable. It is blind to the moral choices which go into the melting-pot of the process of identity formation. To answer the question raised above: individual and group choices come to cohere in a societal identity—when they do—only by virtue of higher-level *moral* decisions about what counts and what does not in the image we want to have of ourselves. Whether it is the state, the Supreme Court or simply the most powerful hidden interests which settle the matter is less important than that we recognize the inescapable ethical judgment in the process of choosing the components of a collective identity. These agencies are political instruments, made necessary by the fact that social order requires a referee with the mandate to speak for society. In Buzan (1991), as noted, the state was not only given the political mandate in relation to security, it was also ontologically identified with the needs and rights of the people whose security was at stake. The moral judgment involved in Buzan's account is hidden within the function of the

³² Waever et al., *Identity, Migration*, p. 21.

state. In the new focus on societal identity, there is no referee and there are no criteria for legitimizing decisions about identity. In effect, the construction of identity and the resolution of identity disputes are left to emerge, incorrigible and beyond assessment, from the mysterious workings of society. The element of normative judgment in the negotiations which constitute the permanent process of identity formation is lost.

Collective identity is not 'out there', waiting to be discovered. What is 'out there' is identity discourse on the part of political leaders, intellectuals and countless others, who engage in the process of constructing, negotiating and affirming a response to the demand—at times urgent, mostly absent—for a collective image. Even in times of crisis, this is never more than a provisional and fluid image of ourselves as we want to be, limited by the facts of history. The relevance of this argument to the concept of societal security should be clear.

Conclusion

Three general points which summarize the main threads of the foregoing discussion will be made, in addition to a brief comment on the implications of the identity thesis for Buzan's analysis of security in *People, States and Fear*.

The validity of the identity thesis hinges on the objectivism of the authors' concepts of 'society' and 'identity'. Society is conceived as a social fact, with the same objectivity and ontological status as the state. Notwithstanding several passing comments to the contrary, the authors' definition and analysis of society is essentially Durkheimian. This perspective determines the methodology and skews the inquiry and level of analysis away from that required for a process which is constituted by social practices. Such a focus would view 'society' and 'state' as an 'objectification' of social interaction, in Berger and Luckmann's sense of the term;³³ they are a particular class of dependent, not independent, variable.

Secondly, the misunderstanding of 'identity' follows from the definition of society. Who we are is not a matter of fact imposed on individuals who 'belong' to the 'society' of Waever et al. Their idea of collective identity as a social fact projects the image of a collective self to be discovered: we are who we are. The evidence and philosophical argument point more convincingly to process and negotiation: we are who we want to be, subject to the constraints of history. Such constraints set limits to the boundaries of possibility; the case for an ecumenical harmony of identity between Danes and Swedes is clearly more plausible than that between Danes and Zulus. Within such constraints, disagreements about identity can and do flourish and, where they give rise to conflict and have security implications, can be settled, but only by moral decision informed by factual observation, not by observation alone.

A third and related point is that this decision in regard to identity and its security is a normative one. We cannot assume, by definition, that 'society' embodies a single value or interest—identity—which stands alongside the values of the state as the

³³ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, Pt 2 (London, 1969), pp. 65ff.

only object of vulnerability and threat which is relevant to security analysis. The problem is, rather, to investigate which interests are at stake and who are the interested parties pursuing them.

The political concepts of interests and legitimacy suggest themselves as being more fruitful analytical tools for understanding and interpreting recent or past events in Europe than identity and societal security. The concept of interests captures the political reality prior to the emergence into the security arena of any sense of common identity. From the macro-side of the state, its *legitimacy* to speak identity and security on behalf of all takes priority over 'socio-political cohesion', in Buzan's understanding of the term, as the value that determines the strength of the state, and thus the state's capacity to integrate with other strong states in a mature anarchy.³⁴ In addition to their immediacy and common-sense fit with the empirical evidence, 'interests' have the merit of exposing the normative concerns of the actors whose values are at issue, while 'legitimacy' directs attention to the viability of the decision of the state or other agency which must judge the claims of rival interests.

Media interpretation of recent events in Europe has highlighted the rise of nationalism and national identity, because these are the terms most frequently employed by the principal political actors. It is media myth-making to interpret the evidence of the first Danish referendum on Maastricht as 'Denmark says No to the State', or in the Macedonia dispute to assert that 'Greeks defend ancient rights'. The reification of identity makes intellectuals the unwitting accomplices of these journalistic conventions.

No one can deny that some sense of common identity is a product of living together in common institutions, or that national identity *can* become a security problem. The problem is to interpret identity claims, rather than assume their validity and coherence. It behoves security theorists to take care not to make the task of particular interest groups—and journalists—easier by postulating identity as a social reality to which people subscribe. Waever et al.'s book will make claims for the protection of national identity all the easier to substantiate, without investigation of the interests underlying them or of the moral choices involved in any decision to authenticate them. It may in time be used by EU states as theoretical support for the renationalization of common policies, for tougher policies on migration and for a state-biased interpretation of subsidiarity. In such an eventuality, Waever et al. may be viewed by IR theorists and historians as a significant straw in a familiar wind of theoretical change, propelled, yet again, by events which serve policy interests.

Finally, Waever et al. are silent on how they see the continuity between Buzan (1991) and the identity thesis. There is only passing reference to the two central ideas on which Buzan's broader concept of security pivots: security complex and the concept of strong/weak states.³⁵

Rejecting the realist idea that domestic affairs had no relevance to international security, Buzan (1991) dipped into domestic waters with his concept of socio-

³⁴ Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, ch. 2.

³⁵ While security-complex analysis is adopted in Waever et al., *Identity, Migration*, ch. 7 on 'Europe and the Middle East', it is not integrated with the identity concerns of the book. As with Wiberg's discussion of Yugoslavia, ch. 7 imposes an 'identity' relevance on an essentially traditional security discussion.

political cohesion, but he ventured no further. Cohesion had to be seen as an instrument and property of the state, if his general model of international security within anarchy—which entailed state primacy—was to be preserved. Human beings were ultimately the reason for all security, but they had no place in the analysis which explained its dynamics; their agency was blocked by the theoretical decision to explain security only at the levels of the state and the international system. Now Waever et al., and Buzan as joint author, emphatically reject the primacy of the state and appear to have gone much further in the domestic direction. After all, what could be more human and domestic than to counterpose society and its identity to the state as an object of security in its own right? However, it is clear that ‘societal identity’ is not the identity of a collectivity of human beings. ‘Societal security is not used in this book as a “more human” concept of security . . .’³⁶ Society is a technical term, defined not as a human process but as a reality transcending the individuals who belong to it. Where does the new focus on societal security leave Buzan’s concept of the ‘strong state’?

As Steve Smith suggests, one can discern a prescriptive dimension in Buzan’s understanding of strong states in a mature anarchy.³⁷ One could argue that the substantive policy implications of his book are not those under the heading ‘Implications for Policy’,³⁸ but are contained in the prescriptive treatment of his concepts of strong state and security complex. A mature anarchy is, after all, a position on his continuum of regional security configurations, related to the idea of a ‘security community’. If the move from security complex to security community is desirable, as it clearly is, so too is the move from weak to strong states in the international arena. Becoming a strong state is a condition of participating in a security community.

In Buzan (1991), the primacy of the state is the pivot on which the domestic dimension of the strong state and the international dimension of regional security turn. The seminal character of *People, States and Fear* lay in the break with the realism of traditional security studies marked by these two ideas. The movement on a spectrum of weak to strong states directed attention to the domestic level, and the corresponding movement from immature to mature anarchy (or, in regional terms, from security complex to security community) introduced the possibility and need for change at the international level. Together, they represented a more complex and adequate picture of reality and of the possibilities of change than the realists could envisage.

Theoretically, this advance depended on maintaining the realist doctrine on state primacy. The agency of change in the domestic as in the international sphere could not be attributed to sub-state or supra-state actors. If sub-state actors were credited with the capacity to shift the state, then something close to anarchy would rule at the domestic level. By definition, there could be no stability in the socio-political cohesion which Buzan understood as a state-managed domestic order and which was a defining characteristic of his ‘strong state’. On the other hand, if the international system were allowed to determine shifts in the security position of the state, Buzan would have to reformulate his entire theoretical framework. His version

³⁶ Waever et al., *Identity, Migration*, p. 24.

³⁷ Smith, ‘Mature Anarchy’.

³⁸ Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, pp. 374ff.

of realism sees anarchy as a constant, with modifications in regional configurations brought about by the actions of states. It is on the security of the state that the security of people and of the international system depends. While an overall environment of anarchy determines the range of state actions, any change in the character of the state from weak to strong can only be brought about by the state itself.

The problem, then, is to understand how the identity thesis is compatible with Buzan's security theory. The concept of a strong state rested on the subordination of society to the state. Now, in Waever et al. the state is no longer the uniquely privileged actor. Domestic resistance to the state cannot be viewed as some kind of pathology. The vulnerability of identity to external threats is now viewed as the vulnerability no longer of the state, but of an autonomous actor and potential rival within its boundaries: society. The management of societal identity, which Buzan saw as the business of the state in building the social cohesion essential to becoming strong and fit for membership of a security community within a mature anarchy—this task is now in the hands of society itself. A strong sense of societal identity could very likely, and not just pathologically, coincide with resistance to the state. How changes in identity are effected, or disputes about identity are resolved, is not addressed by Waever et al. Who would judge? Buzan's implicit answer was 'the state', and this allowed for the possibility of change from weak to strong state which was critical to his thesis. If society is now an independent variable, no longer subordinate to the state, then it appears that the Copenhagen school has undermined Buzan's original thesis. Buzan himself has collaborated in an analysis of security which purports to develop his analysis of 1983–91 but, in fact, subverts it, without enhancing our understanding of the problems of security.