

Beyond liberal bio-politics: Imagining a post-human security form of individual security

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Abstract

This paper critically investigates into the possibility of rethinking the 'human' category of (human) security politics. Initially, we understand the compound "post-human security" as a situation in which analytical approaches depart from their current focus on human security being depicted as a challenge to national security. We argue that rather than a challenge to national security (in the West) the 'human' category is currently but a liberal interventionist form of biopolitics. Eventually, we argue that in order to imagine other forms of human security one has to re-conceptualise the place of the 'human' – both, in liberal governmentality in general as well as in security politics and security studies in particular.

Human Security as liberal bio-politics

The shift from Cold War national security to Post-Cold War human security politics has cleared the way for a global landscape which has been seemingly different in nature and the way agents, mainly states, have been acting upon it. The legal principle of national sovereignty has been questioned (or even: discredited) by human rights activists – the so-called global civil society – as well as ethically and morally 'superior' governments in their overarching attempts to instil universal principles of human rights into pre-modern societies under authoritarian or – more generally non-democratic – rule through both, diplomatic and military interventions (Irwin 2003, Chandler 2002). The assumption of a responsibility to protect on behalf

of the international community which is congruent with ad-hoc coalitions of Western states has over the last decade resulted in a change of military and security doctrines in general, the nature of military operations abroad and the legal framework to legitimise this shift (with different emphasis and appraisals of this trend, cf. Naidu 2001, Duffield 2001, McRae and Hubert 2001, Cairo 2006, Bain 2006, ICISS 2001). At the core of this new human security agenda lays an intrinsic dialectic of the (supposed) entitlement to universal human rights standards of every individual and a simultaneous particularism in political agents who claim the right to enforce these rights. The degree and urgency of protection individuals (seemingly) need, differs with the respective foreign policy agenda and the worldview of the respective nations' officials in the external affairs departments. The programs intended to 'protect' individuals are also not necessarily interconnected with an evaluation of the individual's socio-economic situation that becomes acted upon (see Axworthy 1997; DFAIT 1999; DFAIT 2002). In that respect it is mostly but associated with a politics of emergency: emergency relief efforts, food aid, the creation of safe havens and buffer zones (Duffield 2001: 162-63). However, not all of these reactive ad-hoc policies privilege (the most basic) physical well-being over what is considered a fulfilment of basic human needs. Yet, this socio-economic dimension is often associated with a human security approach whose claim to 'empower' individuals is more a rhetorical refurbishment of existing programs of development aid than a radically new approach to bring about local, sustainable economic structures through grass-root level activities and the input of local knowledge (CHS 2003; MOFA 2002, 2003, 2006;

Minami 2006, Thomas 2000: 51, 126). Countries which have been pursuing an 'ethical' foreign policy or one that is based on the leitmotif of human security, such as the UK, Canada, Japan or member states of the Human Security Network (HSN) have stuck to either the (first mentioned) narrow 'freedom from fear' (UK, Canada, Norway, HSN) or the broader 'freedom from want' perspective (Bosold and Werthes 2005; MacFarlane and Khong 2006; Wheeler and Dunne 1998). What both concepts have in common, though, is a conflation of the protection and/or empowerment of individuals with different forms of intervention, be they military (Fierke 2005, ch. 5), economic (ibid., ch. 6) or therapeutic, in either bio-political (Pupavac 2005) or socio-psychological ways (Fierke 2005, ch. 8).

Rationalities of Human Security

Coming back to our initial caveat concerning the current conceptualisation / understanding of security, we argue that the dual ontology in security studies (the individual vs. the state) is a chimera and unsustainable due to two reasons. *Firstly*, the predominant contemporary rationality of governing societies, i.e. the governmentality of advanced liberalism, rests on the premise that 'man appears in his ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and a subject that knows' (Foucault). However, our argument is that this type, though at the surface level almost ubiquitously present, is not the only type of governmentality informing thoughts and practices of individuals and even entire societies, especially in the

spaces that are undergoing (societal) transformations¹ (also cf. Sending and Neumann 2006). A post-human security politics thus needs to pay more attention to various logics of governmentalities according to which individuals (may) act. This step is seen as indispensable to the extent that the field of IR still has (and will have) something relevant to say about the nature of contemporary socio-political transformations. We think that such advancement might overcome the largely one-dimensional concepts of human security as well as national security. Specifically, the notion of the individual/one's subjectivity as introduced in liberalist-informed human security and neo-realist-based state security, in which both respective entities are conceptualised with a great deal of homogenising qualities, will be rebutted. In other words, what matters are different configurations of power that shape the practices of individuals in different geographical areas as well as social and political environments. Forms of existing liberal governmental logics span from external institutional power to internalised biopower. The latter one is crucial for understanding Western structural pressure on individuals as knowledge producers and active and responsible citizens who are increasingly becoming, alongside the structure of neo-liberal economic ideology, key actors in the dissemination of advanced liberal governmentality in non-Western societies. Such an activity can take on different forms – the promotion of human rights or the deliveries of development aid are but two conspicuous examples (see Duffield 2001). With regard to the latter, the aim of this paper is congruent with the redirection of the focus of the current

¹ This is the case if we don't conceive of the governmentality of advanced liberalism as the only legitimate and universally accepted form of governmentality.

human security paradigm from individuals as passive recipients of aid and paramount referent objects which need to be secured to techniques and programmes through which their subjectivity is being transformed. *Secondly*, we do not believe in human security in which the paramount referent object is an analytically insulated individual. Such an approach is but able to assess the successful securitisation of the individual as 'human' by the state. In order to conceive of other forms of human security the politics of human security need to be detached from (or imagined without) the securi(tisi)ng power of the state.

The Rationality of Human vs. National Security

We thus argue that a closer look is needed to interrogate into the hybridity of sovereignty as a result of the (discursive) shift from national to human security and its subsequent governmental practices. Moreover, we argue that a governmental analysis of 'human security' politics is needed to move beyond the superficiality of the debates which focus on 'broadening' and 'deepening' security (most prominently, see Krause and Williams 1996). Arguing that national security should be replaced or complemented by human security, adding referent objects or enlarging the fields/domains of security issues (not in the sense of Bigo-dian [?] fields of security as techniques of surveillance and control, see Bigo 2000) does however nothing but scratching the surface of the changing rationality of governing beyond national borders. In so doing we do not claim (or try) to rethink 'human security' from a 'post-human' but rather a 'post-human security' perspective, that is, by

imagining other rationalities and techniques of liberal government. Liberalism is thus understood here in a Foucauldian sense, as a technique or technology, not as an ideology, theory or a way in which society (re)presents itself (Foucault 2004b: 435-438, Foucault 1997c: 73-74). Hence, we reject a purely textual, poststructuralist reading of human security that would have to be 'post-human' in the sense that "it [posthumanism; D.B.-N.H.] resembles poststructuralist efforts to decompose and negate the epistemic warrants of all natural and social scientific inquiries" (Jones 1996: 293). Put differently, if we accept the "refusal to address the question of 'human nature'" (ibid.) by poststructuralism we not only dispense with the empirical task of interrogating into the various forms of governmental rationality but also with imagining forms of human security which are grounded in cultural concepts.

Hybridity of sovereignty in human security governmentality

The human security paradigm of countries as diverse as Japan, Canada, Norway and the members of the European Union have officially embraced human security in order to provide for *freedom from want* and/or *freedom from fear* of individuals (SGESC 2004, CHS 2003, DFAIT 1999, 2002). Yet, while these countries argue that security should be human- rather than state-centric, all fail to specify the 'human' category, the relationship of the state and humans in particular and the locus of sovereignty in general.

The first shortcoming is that the 'human' category is far from being specific. That is because human-centred security is semantically not fully defined and especially lacks

a categorisation of human security vs. individual security vs. personal security. What sounds like mere semantics may yield concrete political results when we look at the issues and practices we associate with the respective terms. 'Human' in this context is strongly attached to the idea of human rights, the inviolability of a person's dignity and universal principles. It is this characteristic – as opposed to i.e. 'individual' which has a seemingly strong(er) atomistic connotation – that can be used to frame political practices in moral and universal terms. In addition, a paradox aspect in that respect is the projection of human insecurity and misery abroad while a retreat of the state takes place domestically. More precisely, the capacity and – at least as importantly – the need to act in a globalised world becomes enunciated and eventually demonstrated through a nation's foreign policy which seeks to protect 'humans' abroad by supporting de-mining activities, disarming illegal combatants and trials of war criminals. When it comes to the domestic realm social security systems are (being presented as being) under pressure due to the forces of globalisation and responsibility in terms of health care, retirement arrangements fall increasingly into the domain of the 'individual'. While we do not claim to be able to resolve this paradoxical situation, we think it is important to note that the idea/concept of sovereignty has undergone a fundamental change. The suggested primacy of universal human rights and increased attempts to legalise world politics (Abbott et al. 2000) has had a significant impact on the assumed responsibility and governmental tasks of the liberal state. Foreign policy has consistently been presented as serving universal ends, deeply embedded in an ethico-moral discourse

that is opposed to the Cold War discourse of foreign policy as the result of a selfish and brute national interest (DFAIT 2002; DFAIT 1998; Cairo 2007).

The legitimacy of political action in general and the willingness (and discursively mediated necessity) to use physical violence in order to protect either the 'nation'(state) or 'humans' has its roots in a quasi-transcendental nature of sovereignty which has itself experienced a transitional process in locus. This is an apparently 'wrong' reading of Foucault in the sense that he argues for an omission of the term 'sovereignty' to investigate into mechanisms of societal power relations. Yet, we argue that his reading of 'sovereignty' is unsustainable in the light of our argument developed here. 'Sovereignty' for Foucault is largely restricted to a philosophico-juridical discourse (Foucault 1997a: 59-61; Foucault 1999)² and the presence and manifestations of violence are linked to a "historico-political discourse [..., that] makes war the permanent basis of all the institutions of power" (Foucault 1997a: 61). It seems, however, that there is another transformation of sovereignty taking place which has considerable repercussions on the way in which (international) politics is depicted. In order to shed light on this transformation we have to briefly recapitulate the historical transformation in locus of sovereignty. After the concept emanated in the quasi-divine character of the emperor and/or king (not the body, for the king's death did not result in the end of the king's rule in a dynastic sense) it was subrogated to the people, the birth of the sovereignty of the

² "In order to conduct a concrete analysis of power relations, one would have to abandon the juridical notion of sovereignty. That model presupposes the individual as a subject of natural rights or original powers; it aims to account for the ideal genesis of the state; and it makes law the fundamental manifestation of power" (Foucault 1997a: 59).

people (Bartelson 1995: ch. 5, 6, Haltern 2007: 38ff.) With this (post-)revolutionary transition of sovereignty and the end of the *ancien régime* emerge political practices to patrol borders, to protect the territorial integrity of the state and to instil domestic order through means such as policing (Foucault 1997a, b, c; 2004a, b). It is the simultaneous evolution of a national collective identity in the form of 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006) that brings in an additional impetus for preserving the social body of the state through a (historicised) narrative of the founding myth which coincides with the biopolitical techniques of the modern state. To maintain the territorial status quo not only is it important to protect the social body (in form of the state's citizens) on behalf of the state through the build-up of a standing army. What is different is that the protection of the territorial integrity of the state is now being conceived of as the (patriotic) duty of its citizens and not of the king's mercenaries (Foucault 2004b). In terms of the juridical dimension the transition becomes enshrined in international customary law which acknowledges the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state, either in the form of the sovereignty of the people or other principles of sovereign rule. What interests here, is that all states in international law, irrespective of their territorial stretch and their population's size, are formally and legally equals – the same holds true for the citizen of the liberal state. The latter point is warranted due to recourse to the natural rights conception (Haltern 2007: 76). As a result we can thus ideally observe a two-layered, legally enshrined structure of universality *and* equality: at the level of states in form of the international system and the principle of non-intervention (or right to peaceful co-

existence), mainly referred to as residing in the UN charter (Onuf 1971: 212; Chandler 2004: 65). And, at the level of the individual (as the citizen of a state) enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Alves 2000: 478; Haltern 2007: 75ff.).

Practical implications of human security governmentality

The current problem with the 'human' in human security can thus be seen in the apparent use as a so-called referent object (in addition or instead of the state). The category 'human' as such, however, does not entail any accepted logic of *how* and *by whom* this state of security is to be realised, neither how this *state of security* is characterised. What can be observed, though, is a biopolitical and/or military enforcement of the 'liberal peace' in the name of universal principles which do, however, rest on the premise that the only legitimate form of governmentality able to secure humans is the liberal state (Chandler 2004; Cohen 2003). It is here where the nexus of sovereignty and legal universality finds a political expression. Although procedures and codifications exist to, both, legitimising military interventions through of an un-vetoed UN Security Council mandate as well as securing the 'human' in the sense of economic, social and political rights to which he or she is entitled (including the most basic rights of human dignity and physical integrity) we can observe political practice that are intended to transcend the sovereignty of non-liberal states to a post-national sphere of international legalisation. This type of analysis which observes a general shift in the locus of power away from the nation-state towards a post-national liberal empire (most prominently proclaimed by Hardt

and Negri 2000) or some kind of global governmentality (Larner and Walters 2004; Perry and Maurer 2004) however underestimates the willingness on behalf of liberal states to protect and defend their respective sovereignty. Secondly, it applies Foucault's concepts of biopower and governmentality prematurely in 'scaling them up' to a political space beyond the nation-state (cf. Selby 2007: 326, 334). We should thus rather proceed by analysing 'human security' as a form of concerted foreign policy. Hence, even if recommendations of how to redefine state sovereignty result in concrete policies of some states having the right to intervene (with the ICISS using the more euphemistic term: responsibility to react/protect) in the affairs of others, it remains still unclear *which measures* have to or should be taken to provide for the security of the individual. More fundamentally, however, actors from the outside define the *state of security* as well as the *means* to achieve it. This is because their conceptualisation (unsurprisingly) does not transcend the state but relates human security to a certain kind of governmentality that seeks to protect the individual from quantifiable and objectified threats. Following that logic the referent object of security becomes shifted from the state to the individual. Yet, only some states *are allowed* to protect *an externally defined* group by using *certain kind of means*. Put differently: while political decisions are taken to protect individuals neither are these individuals involved in some deliberative process whether they *want* to be freed from the externally specified threat(s) nor *how* this is going to take place. At the centre of this *problematique* lies a (self-righteous) understanding of liberal governments to associate the external enforcement of human rights with a hybrid

form of national/post-national sovereignty and a narrative of progress. Increased legal regulation and codification in international law becomes equated with a teleology of the rule of law as superior to the political which is seen as an impediment to peace (Halterne 2007). This argument is in need of further elaboration. While we briefly discussed the changing locus of sovereignty from a 'representative' of the divine will in the form of the absolutist monarch to the 'imagined community' of the nation the idea of statehood, (post-)national responsibility and the Westphalian (state) system has undergone a liberal metamorphosis that is hybrid and paradoxical in character. Human Security as a *leitmotif* of foreign policy reconstructs the legitimacy of liberal rule in Western societies through a narrative of interdependence, human insecurity abroad and a domestic politics based on values.

As the Canadian White Book of 1995 puts it:

"Successful promotion of our values - respect for human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and the environment - will make an important contribution to international security in the face of new threats to stability. Acceptance of such values abroad will help safeguard the quality of life at home: Canada is not an island able to resist a world community that devalued beliefs central to our identity" (DFAIT 1995: Summary).

This new epistemic reality then translates into a reconsideration of the means to sustain the end: the ontological security of the liberal state (Mitzen 2006). While it is less challenged in its territorial integrity 'new' security threats make it more vulnerable than ever before. The claim of former German defence secretary Peter Struck that "Germany's security is also defended at the Hindu Kush" (Netzeitung 2004) is on the one hand illustrative of this discursive shift to frame (national) security in terms of interdependence. On the other hand proponents of human

security, such as the *Study Group on Europe's Security Capabilities* working for Javier Solana have identified an "enlightened self-interest" (SGESC 2004: 10) for adopting a human security approach and relate it to a moral dimension (ibid.: 9). Thus, the justification for acting becomes not only justified in cases where no 'existential threat' to the state exists (Buzan, Waever, de Wilde 1998: 21-22). It is even portrayed as a legal obligation for the liberal state to extend its domestic duty to guaranteeing security (as rooted in the social contract) beyond its territorial border.

Reconceptualising Human Security Politics

Whatever the prospects for a new governmentality of 'human' security may be: the politics of human security – or better the biopolitical governance called human security – needs to be transcended in order to arrive at a point where 'post-human security' politics is possible. Not only is human security in current academic and political discourse unthinkable without reference to the nation state, sovereignty and, thus: the conception of national security. Crucial to a different understanding of 'human' security is the imagination of a condition in which the individual is thought of as 'human' without reference to various forms of biopolitics. In that respect one has reflect on the liberal, euro-centric character of contemporary security governance (Acharya 2000) and should try to re-conceptualise the 'human' in the security discourse as:

(a) a member of and individual belonging to diverse forms of community

(Bauman 2003, Linklater 2005) rather than a citizen whose security is to be

protected by the state (that is itself reduced to the governmental logic of advanced liberalism),

(b) a culturally influenced (or constructed) human being with an individual (subjective) perception of his/her security (Barkawi and Laffey 2006) rather than a human with a quantifiable and generalisable need of protection

(c) an individual able to exert 'choice' (Booth 1991) as opposed to an 'over-securitised' victim of a biopolitics through intervention.

In doing so, we think that the current securitisation of humans or individuals does not secure humans, rather it – successfully – securitizes the political means and ends of a politics proclaiming to secure individuals. Put differently: not the individual and its freedoms become secur(itis)ed, but the political machinery to define *who* is to be secur(itis)ed and from *what* (one might argue from exercising his/her own freedom thereby creating his/her security). Worse, no teleological character or component of human security (beyond a global political space of liberal states) exists, hence making individual security the object of forces legitimised (or claiming legitimacy) for any alteration in their unrestricted course of action. What is thus needed in order to push for a different form of human security politics is not a debate on the relationship of the state vs. the individual but rather on the governmental practices who define *which kind of actor* is given the right (or power) to define *who* is to be protected and *how* that this is going to happen. Since security is not only a 'contested concept' (Connolly) but an ambiguous term entailing the subjective feeling of being secure and

the (objective?) absence of a threat it becomes obvious that human security must take into account various subjectivities of security.

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