Malcolm McIntosh and Alan Hunter (eds.)

New Perspectives on Human Security


Arguably, security is a contested concept. Conventionally, national security that is state-centred and military-oriented has been predominant in the discourse on security. However, the concept of human security, which puts individual human agency at the centre, has raised its profile academically and practically. Following this emerging reformulation and expansion of the concept of security, the aim of this book edited by Malcolm McIntosh and Alan Hunter is to make a comprehensive and extensive analysis of human security in terms of its concept and practical application.

In the foreword, Mehrnaz Mostafavi states,

“while national security still remains pivotal to peace and stability, the need for an expanded paradigm of security that: draws attention to the multitude of threats that cut across different aspects of human life; that concentrates on the security of the individuals, their protection and empowerment; that highlights the interface between the lack of security, development and human rights; and that promotes a new integrated, coordinated and people-centred approach is also underlined by national and global challenges.”

To this end, five sections with 16 chapters constitute the book, in which various contributors analyse human security from respectively distinct angles to illustrate the multiplicity and diversity of security we have to address.

Section 1 on ‘Introductions’ contains 3 chapters. Here, the basic ideas of human security, critical examination of the relationship between global governance and its impact on human security, and the investigation of the extent to which the United Nations has operationalized human security so far are presented. Section II on ‘Human security and health’ illustrates how health issues can be connected to human security. Examination on how HIV/AIDS issues have promoted the incorporation of health security within the framework of human security in Africa and critique of the healthcare system of the USA are made. Section III on ‘The environmental imperative, sustainable enterprise and human security’ makes the linkage between human security from the perspectives of climate change, corporate responsibility and the emerging sustainable enterprise economy. In this section, 5 topics are introduced: examination of a sustainable enterprise economy that integrates the principles of human security; analysis of sustainable enterprise based on human security in line with the parallel development of the discourses on corporate citizenship and human security; enhancement of human security by UN Global Compact based on the Japanese proposal for CPR (Corporate Peace Responsibility); critical examination of the negative impact of oil business upon human security in the post-conflict Angola; and critique of the negative impact of the coltan mining business on human security in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Section IV on ‘Human security, relations and community’ deals with two themes: attachment theory and human security on the nexus between conflict, human relations and community;

1. Mostafavi, xv.
and the case study of Northern Ireland with a call for a better view of interface concerns to address the cycle of violent conflict. Section V on ‘Human security and responsibility to protect (R2P) examines four subjects: comparative analysis between the idea of responsibility to protect and human security and exploration of their complementarity despite their diversity; critical examination of policing in Africa; a critique of the civil war in India; and investigation of the state-sponsored disarmament policy in East Africa.

These chapters insightfully exemplify that the potential of human security is far-reaching and wide-ranging in its application, which allows us to realize that the concept of human security can be relevant to any situation or circumstance in both developing and developed countries as citizens in any state can be exposed to serious crime, social marginalization and discrimination, terrorism, or other human rights violations. Though the concept of human security is not a panacea for all concerns of insecurity and vulnerability, this book successfully proves, by demonstrating the complexity and multi-dimensionality of problems human beings face, that it can be a useful and significant framework to analyse and address them.

My critique of this book is the underdevelopment of the argument on the relationship between culture and human security. In foreword, Ramesh Thakur states, "The emotional rod that connects both the protection and well-being agendas is solidarity across borders, the sense of shared affinity with fellow human beings qua human beings regardless of differences in nationality, race, religion or gender." Doubtless, this is the fundamental banner of human security or more generally peace research since its ethos is to transform violent and unequal world into a more just and peaceful one where each human being can gratify his/her basic human needs and be given an equal opportunity to seek to achieve his/her own potential to the fullest. However, what should be emphatically proposed here is that without taking culture into serious consideration, it would be difficult to put the above mentioned spirit into practice more proactively and productively.

As Avruch and Black claim, the concern with the role of culture in peace research arises from "a conception of social life in which culture is seen to be a fundamental feature of human consciousness, the sine qua non of being human." Culture is the assumption and presupposition that individuals and groups hold about the world: shared common sense that is essentially local. Accordingly, the essential questions concerning human security such as “How can human security be defined or characterised?” “How can we know human security has been achieved?” to name a few, need to be examined and answered according to each culture. Further, a self-reflexive and critical question, which is, whether contemporary human security is a globally applicable enterprise or whether it is founded upon some hidden cultural values that are not necessarily universally shared must be examined.

Truly, these questions are difficult and challenging to examine and answer. However, as long as the concept of human security is conceptually constructed and culture assumes the central

2. Thakur, viii.
role in the construction, the above proposed cultural questions should be analysed and certain answers need to be explored.

Despite my critique, I would strongly recommend this book for its excellence in highlighting a comprehensive and thorough examination on human security both conceptually and practically, which enables us to envisage its great potential of contribution made for a just and harmonious and more humane world. Although much has been devoted to the promotion of human security, there is no end-point of its intellectual and practical engagement and so we must keep developing its concept and practical methods to approach problems facing human beings and globe, which allows me to foresee that my critique proposed here will be taken up in studies in human security to come.

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