Journal of Human Security

Editorial for Journal of Human Security Volume 11

Sabina W. Lautensach [1, 2, 3]

[1] *Editor-in-Chief* of the Journal of Human Security, Librello, Basel, Switzerland
[2] Human Security Institute, Canada
[3] University of Northern British Columbia, Terrace, BC, V8G 4A2, Canada; E-Mail: salaut@gmail.com

Dear Reader,

This editorial marks the beginning of the journal's eleventh year since its inception as the *Australasian Journal of Human Security*. As a sample from an extremely tumultuous era in human history, this time span has consistently provided an abundance of human security issues for me to comment on. Yet, for the first time since that fateful day in September of 2001, I feel that the world has arrived at another historical turning point. I am referring to the attack on the Paris office of the satirical journal *Charlie Hebdo* on January 7 and the events immediately following it.

As with the attack on the World Trade Center, the immediate retrospective reaction of "well of course, it was inevitable" bounces around the internet commentaries. Truly, European immigration policies and migration trends have long moved along a collision course with the widespread xenophobia and cultural intolerance that seem firmly entrenched even in 'progressive' European countries, fuelling the growth of various protest movements on the political far right. Even to the casual tourist, the masses of African street dealers in public squares and railway stations seemed to increase with every year. In 2010 German chancellor Angela Merkel pronounced the failure of German multiculturalism as a public ideal [1].

Besides the unabated mass influx of migrants and domestic xenophobia, several additional factors contributed to this sense of inevitability. To summarise them very briefly:

• The office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) has since its inception insisted on a definition of refugees that excludes people displaced for environmental reasons. This has resulted in consistent underestimates of the problems arising from population displacement in West Africa and other regions most afflicted with environmental deterioration. Those migrants contribute the bulk of the influx into Europe through Italy, Spain and France, and most of them are Muslims. Recognised or not, the numbers of environmental refugees are bound to increase further.

• Around the world, governments are increasingly falling short of recognising and addressing the most pressing challenges to the human security of their citizens [2]. This includes ignoring anthropogenic climate change and overpopulation, collusion with and support of sinister corporate agenda, failing to demilitarise politics, and supporting a global economic system that, in the inimitable words of ecological economist Bill Rees, "wrecks its planetary home, exacerbates inequity, undermines social cohesion, generates greater net costs than benefits and ultimately threatens to lead to systemic collapse" [3].

• While the expansion of social media and global communications has led to unprecedented amounts of freely expressed opinion, not all of those voices extolled the virtues of tolerance and human rights. Ideologies of hate, violence and discrimination have gained exposure and adherents as result of the above developments. Backlash reactions, as in the

librello

• case of the 2014 film *The Interview*, involved multinational corporations and national governments and threats to cybersecurity.

• Despite all our 21st century interconnectedness, religious fundamentalism has also gained followers. This is by no means confined to Islam; radical Christians committed their share of torture, persecution and mass killings for many centuries, and the succession of radical Zionist regimes in Israel is made possible only by fundamentalist support. On the ideologically opposite side, radical secular modernists preach the utter commodification of nature and unending economic growth with equal disregard for human security and with similarly disastrous consequences.

• In spite of the equitable historical culpability of organised religions worldwide, Islam now has a severe image problem. The problem arises out of mistaken or self-serving interpretations of its scriptures by influential clerics, corruption in the ranks of some of its national leaders [4], stark contrasts between widely advertised Western and Muslim gender stereotypes and penal codes, and the stream of media accounts reporting publicly condoned violence against women and girls in some Muslim countries, regions or communities. I refer to this as an image problem because I feel unqualified to assess the extent of actual wrongdoing versus its representation in the media. Nevertheless, image is important—not least because it can elicit further wrongdoing on all sides.

The latter point requires some elaboration. Islam is by no means the only religion that features a somewhat spotty history of responsible leadership. There is something particularly unholy about using spiritual teachings to transform a congregation of kind-natured and generally well-intentioned people into a raging mob. This has been accomplished many times in history by a particular kind of religious leader in various creeds, the kind that in Noah Gordon's words [5] is "capable of praying and hating at the same time". Violence in the name of a religion is surely among that religion's most abominable sins, and yet it happens with astounding historical regularity. With every new incident, I lose a little more of what respect I have left for organised religions and their hierarchies of power.

Much religiously inspired violence arises from the perception of one's deeply held values and beliefs having been offended. In an age where mobility and displacement has caused an unprecedented extent of contact between people of diverse cultures, the chances of inadvertently offending one's neighbour are greatly increased. In fact, the occurrence of such offences is a statistical certainty. We have suggested elsewhere that the only effective measure to prevent violent reactions is for individuals and groups to "prepare to be offended", primarily through educational means [6].

So why do I feel that the recent attacks and their ramifications mark a historical turning point? One reason is the unprecedented amount of public debate about causes, contributing factors, mitigative policies and the framing of responses to such attacks. Most commentaries imply that recurrences are certain. For the sake of their human security, the countries of Schengen Europe need to facilitate and stimulate such a debate in order to come to grips with the problems arising from immigration. I shall come back to that issue later. Another reason is the rallying of public support, equally unprecedented, for the right to free self-expression—a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration [7]. An essential foundation for guaranteeing the freedom of the press, this right lies at the heart of the perceived offences in the Charlie Hebdo instance. Many feel very strongly that the right to express free satirical commentary on anything and anybody is a hallmark of a democratic society. It is not by accident that among the first people to be arrested by newly formed autocratic regimes, 1933 Germany or post-WWII Warsaw Pact countries, for example, have always been writers of political satire.

To uphold the right to free self-expression in principle is as important as to delimit it appropriately. The re-invigorated debate should focus on where those limits should be placed and how they could be democratically determined and enforced. Holocaust deniers and neo-fascist hate propagandists have found out where European societies place the limits to public deception and tolerating intolerance, respectively. Those particular interpretations of free expression obviously crossed the line.

Of course, a widespread consensus on limits does not guarantee that the consensus is morally defensible. Many European societies show strong traditions of anti-Semitism and prejudice against other ethno-cultural minorities such as the Roma. Oral traditions include the memories of Turkish invaders, domestic crusaders against Islam, and numerous wars against one's neighbours. Yet surprisingly seldom has it happened that someone actually took serious offence over a public statement such as a satirical cartoon. The arrival of Europe's Muslim populations changed that.

One might wonder why religion and humour seem so at odds. The more ardent and fundamental a person's religious beliefs, the less he or she seems to tolerate humorous innuendos about it. The only religious leader I see laughing a lot in public is His Holiness the Dalai Lama. What is wrong with the rest of them? This historical turning point might well be taken as an opportunity to examine one's own feelings and reactions and to make a serious effort to prepare to see one's religious values offended. The more difficult that seems to a person, the more urgently he or she probably needs to try.

Of course, the anticipatory effort to prepare to be offended also comes with some obvious limitations. It is unlikely to work in situations where confrontation

between two well-defined cultural groups has persisted in the form of protracted violent conflict for generations. A striking example is the Israel-Palestine conflict with its complex historical background; in this case preparing for offence seems pointless as both sides already live in a state of persistent and multifaceted injury, aggravated by a cultural legitimation of revenge. Confrontations marked by longstanding historical grievances, habitual abuse of entrenched power differentials, widely advocated contrary ideologies and racism, and the poisonous influence of fundamentalist religion on both sides might well be immune to any individual effort to prepare for offence. Against such a background the individual experience of offence pales to insignificance, to a matter-of-fact confirmation of the perceived status quo. In a way the opposing parties are already prepared to be offended, and it offers little help. While Europe is fortunate not to be encumbered by such tragic circumstances, it will require serious efforts not to let the situation deteriorate to that extent. As in 1947 Palestine, the opportunities are still there.

Another obvious limit manifests in situations where the offence is too overwhelming, as in the case of over 2,000 annual cases of female genital mutilation in the UK [8] and in other Western societies. The fact that the practice violates local law seems less offensive to the host culture than does the gross violation of universally recognised human rights, committed on cultural grounds that appear immaterial to the host but all-important to the newcomer. This kind of moral transgression is clearly in a different category than a kosher restaurant serving pork, on account of the human suffering and injustice involved and the violation of moral norms that are globally subscribed to. Asking the host culture to 'just get used to it' would merely aggravate the offence and damage the status of universal human rights. A mutually acceptable compromise seems impossible in such situations.

This latter example shows how the situation of displaced ethnocultural minorities changes the moral ground on which the anticipatory effort to prepare for offence takes place. Displaced people, whether they arrived in their host country voluntarily or by force of circumstance, are insecure guests. What I mean by that is that they lack human security and particularly cultural safety, relative to their hosts; they deserve to be treated as one treats a guest in one's home (expected or not); and they are obliged to behave as polite guests. Now where did we all go wrong in relation to those norms?

What went wrong is, firstly, that neither side had much of an idea of the other's vulnerable spots and value priorities (and still hasn't, I reckon). Both sides have very different cultural senses of humour, honour, rights and obligations—not to speak of the language barrier. But most importantly, *the house is now full*.

For about half a century, European countries have operated under conditions of particularly strong ecological overshoot, meaning that the impacts and demands they made on their environmental support structures (ecosystems) vastly exceeded the capacity of those structures to sustainably support them. In other words, Europe's carrying capacity has long since been exceeded. The only reason this has worked so far is because Europeans could afford to trade, steal or otherwise appropriate resources and capacities from other parts of the world. European colonial empires were not just the passing fancies of monarchs! Even with monarchs having receded into the background, the neo-colonial means of perpetuating regional ecological overshoot have survived and flourished—until recently.

The most significant aspect of this historical turning point is that we are approaching the end of the Age of Waste. Resources are dwindling, populations and their consumption are still growing, pollution and its resultant effects on climate and health are changing the planet and the rules that dictate a species' survival. Many species are falling off the boat, never to be seen again. Ecosystems are collapsing into simpler states, less hospitable to humans and non-humans alike. Every 'developed' national economy will have to adjust to the new contingencies, either by force or by design; people will have to lead less luxurious, less wasteful lives. Such a transition is possible, especially in European societies that already have a low fertility and at least a vague collective memory of historic shortages and economic constraints. But the last thing they need for that effort is more people at this time.

In the short term, Europeans and their guests will do well to prepare to be offended by each other. Where those offences are grave, compromises will need to be negotiated. Furthermore, as an essential requirement for lasting human security, Europeans will need to embark on serious efforts towards their Great Transition [9] towards a sustainable future of acceptable quality. That will require economic degrowth, knuckling down to some hard work, and creating efficient, resilient communities that depend only minimally on external resources. Japan is leading this process by example. But in the less developed, poorer countries the collapse of agro-ecosystems will keep generating refugees by the millions, and they will keep trying to reach for the rich countries, primarily Europe and the US, as their only perceived chance of survival. In the longer term, and under the new conditions of a changed planet, if Europe is to have a reliable chance at attaining a sustainable future with acceptable human security for all its citizens it cannot accept additional millions of new citizens within its borders. Once the Transition is achieved, this policy should be reviewed.

I don't imply that siding with the neo-fascist fringe on their uncompromising 'Fortress Europe' fantasy would carry much promise of achieving that goal. Rather more promising alternatives require a differential approach directed at reducing the 'pull factors'. Immigrant quota should be limited to the demo-

graphic replacement level [10], directing newcomers after appropriate training towards small and midsize communities without contributing to their ghetto-ization. About a third of all immigrants, amounting to about 575,000 individuals in 2012, could be accommodated by such an internal settlement regime. The remaining two thirds would need to be re-directed towards alternative settlement solutions, preferably in their home countries [10]. This reduction of the 'push factors' is where Europe requires the support of the UN and the international community. Without that support, the increasing dangers of uncontrolled immigration would render all sustainable goals elusive, jeopardising Europe's human security for generations to come.

Best wishes,
Sabina W. Lautensach

References

[1] Connolly K. Angela Merkel declares death of German multiculturalism. London, UK: The Guardian; 17 October 2010.

[2] Lautensach A, Lautensach S. Education for Sustainability: How Can Educators Address the Failure of Government? The 4th World Sustainability Forum, 1–30 November 2014. Available from: http://sciforum. net/conference/wsf-4/paper/2450.

[3] Rees WR. Avoiding Collapse: An Agenda for Sustainable Degrowth and Relocalizing the Economy. Vancouver, Canada: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; 2014. p. 15.

[4] Weisman A. Countdown: Our last, best hope for a future on earth? New York, NY, USA: Back Bay Books; 2013.

[5] Gordon N. The Physician. New York, NY, USA: Simon & Schuster; 1986.

[6] Lautensach A, Lautensach S. Prepare to be Offended Everywhere: Cultural Safety In Public Places. Second International Conference on Human Security: Twenty Years of Human Security. Human Security Research Center—Faculty of Security Studies, University of Belgrade, 7–8 November 2014. Proceedings forthcoming.

[7] United Nations. The universal declaration of human rights. New York, NY, USA: United Nations; 1948. Available from: http://www.un.org/en/docu ments/udhr/index.shtml.

[8] McVeigh T. British girls undergo horror of genital mutilation despite tough laws. London, UK: The Guardian; 25 July 2010. Available from: http://www. theguardian.com/society/2010/jul/25/female-circum cision-children-british-law.

[9] Raskin P, Banuri T, Gallopín G, Gutman P, Hammond A, Kates R, Swart R. Great Transition: The Promise and Lure of the Times Ahead. Stockholm Environment Institute Polestar Report no. 10. Boston, MA, USA: SEI; 2002. Available from: http://www.sei-international.org/publications?pid=1547. The point that no lasting human security can be achieved without environmental sustainability has been convincingly presented many times; I am taking it for granted here.

[10] At a total (2014) fertility rate of 1.60 children per woman, Europe's population would shrink in the absence of immigration. Of an estimated 1.7 million immigrants in 2012, 575,000 (or almost 34%) could be absorbed without resulting in a population increase. Sources: Eurostat http://ec.europa.eu/ eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_ migrant_population_statistics, CIA Factbook https:// www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/ geos/ee.html.