
Editorial

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Dear Reader,

A few changes have caught up with our venerable journal since our last issue. As you have noticed, JHS is now published by Librello, an excellent new publishing house based in Switzerland. Volumes 1 through 7 are still available through the RMIT website. The two issues of volume 8 are available freely through our personal blog site [1] and from this current issue onward our issues will be available by open access through the Librello website [2]. All archived volumes are also accessible through the Librello site, although volumes 1 through 7 are still on pay per view. We are grateful to the people at Librello for providing access to our archive in its entirety through their website.

The state of human security has also experienced some notable changes. The 2012 *Human Security Report* [3] painted a glowingly optimistic picture of human security improving worldwide. Of course such sweeping proclamations always rely heavily on their small print, in this case the particular definition of human security employed. Unfortunately there is not even a small print definition to be found in the Report. The reader is obliged to infer that definition from the sources of insecurity that the document recognises. They encompass all forms of 'organised violence': interstate and intrastate armed conflict, the severity and persistence of warfare, and various kinds of military interventions. Thus, the Report limits itself to what Johan Galtung, the pioneer of peace studies, calls 'direct violence'.

What the Report does not count as human

insecurity is what Galtung calls 'structural violence', the slow death from hunger and preventable or curable diseases, caused not by intentional acts of commission, but by neglect, by acts of omission, by gross inequality and by an unjust structure of society. It is estimated that structural violence kills over 100,000 people every day, mostly children [4]. Galtung [5] also introduced the concept of 'cultural violence', the advocacy of direct and structural violence in education, the media, literature and art, in the form of nationalism, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination and prejudice. One wonders how differently the Report's pronouncements would have come out under such a more inclusive perspective.

Furthermore, the Report fully ignores the fourth pillar of human security, on which the other three so frequently depend: the stability, productivity and resilience of environmental support structures. It represents the ecologically naïve position that we encounter from time to time in a minority of students, that food comes from grocery stores and disease from germs. With respect to the fourth pillar, the decline of human prospects hardly requires any further argument.

Given its narrow focus, the Report's assessments and prognoses assume a similarly narrow validity. Its optimistic outlook is not anything new; previous Reports from 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2009/10 invariably announced declines in the number of armed conflicts and their deadliness, in genocide, in human rights abuses, and in terrorism [6]. Those claims are supported by the work of Joshia Goldstein

and Steven Pinker, showing that wars are becoming less common and on average less deadly.

Even when one engages with the Report on its own narrow conceptual territory, not all of its proclamations appear equally defensible. The claim that the number and severity of human rights violations in general are in decline can hardly be supported by data showing decreasing incidence of direct violence alone. Moreover, even in terms of direct physical violence the US State Department's data on its Political Terror Scale (PTS) indicate more of a steady state, or at best a return to 'normal' after a post-Cold War upsurge [7]. This curiously stands in contrast to a demonstrable increase in the number of 'democratic' governments.

An additional reason why overly optimistic reports like this may do more harm to global human security (however defined) than they reassure an already complacent OECD consumer is in its implicit message. Take, for instance, the claim that rape has decreased as a weapon of war: "mainstream narratives on wartime sexual violence and the impact of war on education are often one-sided and misleading". The Report blames NGOs for over-reporting. "The worldwide incidence of sexual violence has likely declined" ([3], p. 79). Framing the information in this way can do severe damage to the cause of human rights. Readers too often infer that things are getting better all the time anyway, which is of course what everybody wants to believe and constantly looks to see confirmed, but this is also fundamentally counterproductive to the quest for human rights. That quest relies desperately on continuous funding, which under neoliberal administrations must come increasingly from private donors and charitable organisations. Those in turn base their allocation decisions on research reports such as this one.

This objection has nothing to do with the fact that the Report's claims may be factually correct, at least in part. It rather addresses the strategic blunder, the outrageous offence to millions of women, and the damage to the cause of human rights and women's security. It raises the question about underlying motives, and Jürgen Habermas's famous question, "who benefits?" What might be the reasons why an organisation dedicated to human security would dissociate itself ideologically from the human rights movement? The Human Security Report Project (HSRP), affiliated with Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada, claims to be an independent research centre even though it receives funds from several national governments (Switzerland, Sweden, UK, Norway) and a private investment banking organisation.

Among the actors who might benefit from the proposition that the global situation of women and human rights has improved (and been misrepresented

by others) are organisations in charge of allocating scarce resources, as well as all those who would rather see those funds be allocated towards more expressly industrial interests, such as defense contracts. The idea of empowering women particularly has never sat well with groups of certain ideological bents, from orthodox religious organisations to extreme conservatives.

As an active educator, I was also surprised by the Report's claim, based on data published by UNESCO's Institute for Statistics, to the effect that educational outcomes did not decline during periods of warfare. Intuitively such a claim seems grotesque. To put it bluntly, if the schoolhouse burning down has no impact on education, then why do we bother with building schoolhouses? Surely kids who are drafted into armies will be unable to attend school? One wonders about the quality of the data used to make this claim sound even marginally convincing. But again my concern lies as much with possible motives as it does with the claim's veracity. Is it intended as a justification of military conflict, or as belittlement of its horrors? Who benefits from it?

On the other side of the coin is the researcher's obligation to report whatever conclusions their data indicate unequivocally. And, as we all know but not do not always acknowledge, bias of framing is unavoidable. Ideally the researcher would cope by representing their conclusions in more than one form, framing them from diverse ideological viewpoints. Academics are (or should be) well acquainted with such dialectical approaches. However, such ideological fence-sitting tends to be frowned upon by funders. Their interest is to see their points of view confirmed. These two approaches appear fundamentally irreconcilable, which usually leaves the decision up to the power differential. I leave it to the reader to guess which side is more powerful, a funding organisation or the researcher.

Taking this argument one step further, the question arises what counterhegemonic obligations arise for the researcher from this inequitable situation. Many would name a judicious screening of possible funding agencies, taking into account the extent of academic latitude, possible conditional strings leading to moral or financial commitments, and the overall ideological bent of the organisation. This ideal clashes of course frequently with what are perceived inevitably as 'realities on the ground'. But so do other academic ideals, such as objectivity, veracity, and equity. We still are expected to try our best. Sadly, the authors of the Human Security Report evidently did not.

Wishing you all a very peaceful 2013!

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