Review of International Studies (2010), 36, 77–94 Copyright © British International Studies Association
doi:10.1017/S0260210509990519

Critical human security studies

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Abstract. From a critical security studies perspective – and non-traditional security studies more broadly – is the concept of human security something which should be taken seriously? Does human security have anything significant to offer security studies? Both human security and critical security studies challenge the state-centric orthodoxy of conventional international security, based upon military defence of territory against 'external' threats. Both also challenge neorealist scholarship, and involve broadening and deepening the security agenda. Yet critical security studies have not engaged substantively with human security as a distinct approach to non-traditional security. This article explores the relationship between human security and critical security studies and considers why human security arguments – which privilege the individual as the referent of security analysis and seek to directly influence policy in this regard – have not made a significant impact in critical security studies. The article suggests a number of ways in which critical and human security studies might engage. In particular, it suggests that human security scholarship must go beyond its (mostly) uncritical conceptual underpinnings if it is to make a lasting impact upon security studies, and this might be envisioned as Critical Human Security Studies (CHSS).

Introduction

This article will explore why critical and non-traditional security studies have largely shunned human security ideas.[1] In particular, the contributions of human security may already be subsumed within critical security studies, and thus may be superfluous as a distinct field of study. In addition, the policy orientation of human security – and its adoption as a policy framework by some governments – has made critical security scholars suspicious of human security as a hegemonic discourse co-opted by the state. Moreover, human security arguments are generally 'problem-solving'. They do not generally engage in epistemological, ontological or methodological debates. Human security is therefore considered – and as a result generally dismissed – as 'uncritical' and unsophisticated by critical security scholars. For its part, because human security scholars wish to remain policy relevant – and accessible to policy circles – they have been reluctant to explore overtly 'critical' security studies themes, either because they feel these are unnecessary or because they fear that such theoretical pursuits will alienate them from the policy world. In addition, many scholars addressing human security

[1] Critical security studies can be conceived broadly to embrace a number of different non-traditional approaches which challenge conventional (military, state-centric) approaches to security studies and security policy. Alternatively, Critical Security Studies can be conceived more narrowly, to represent a particular approach to non-traditional security studies (for example, that proposed by Ken Booth – see below). This article uses the term critical security studies in the former, general sense, unless explicitly indicated.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990519 Published online by Cambridge University Press

challenges do so not from a 'theoretical' security studies background, but rather from areas which tend to be less 'critical' in approach, such as UN or development studies.

The article will suggest a number of ways in which critical and human security studies might engage. In particular, it suggests that human security scholarship must go beyond its (mostly) uncritical conceptual underpinnings if it is to make a lasting impact upon security studies, and this might be envisioned as Critical Human Security Studies (CHSS). In conclusion, the article envisages what research questions CHSS might address and how these debates might be fruitfully conducted. There are difficulties in attempting to be 'critical' – and thus accepted as an academic security studies contribution – *and* policy relevant. Nevertheless, to survive as an intellectual pursuit, Critical Human Security Studies may be the only way forward.

Human security

Human security suggests that security policy and security analysis, if they are to be effective and legitimate, must focus on the individual as the referent and primary beneficiary. In broad terms human security is 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear': positive and negative freedoms and rights as they relate to fundamental individual needs. Human security is normative; it argues that there is an ethical responsibility to re-orient security around the individual in line with internationally recognised standards of human rights and governance. Much human security scholarship is therefore explicitly or implicitly underpinned by a solidarist commitment, and some is cosmopolitan in ethical orientation. Some human security scholarship also seeks to present explanatory arguments concerning the nature of security, deprivation and conflict. In addition, most scholars and practitioners working on human security emphasise the policy orientation of this approach; they believe that the concept of human security can and should result in policy changes which improve the welfare of people.

Growing interest in human security since the early 1990s can be seen within a particular historical and social context which saw the erosion of the narrow, state-centric, militarised national security paradigm in policy and academic circles. This background is well documented elsewhere and need not be examined closely here.[2] There is no uncontested definition of, or approach to, human security; very few supporters of the concept would describe it as a 'paradigm' (although Hampson does).[3] Like all non-traditional security approaches, human security – as a starting point – challenges orthodox neorealist conceptions of international security. Scholars of human security argue that for many people in the world – perhaps even most – the greatest threats to 'security' come from internal conflicts,

[2] Fen Osler Hampson, *Madness in the Multitude: Human Security and World Disorder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh and Anuradha Chenoy, *Human Security Concepts and Implications* (London: Routledge, 2006); Caroline Thomas, *Global Governance, Development and Human Security* (London: Pluto, 2000); Edward Newman, 'Human Security', *International Studies Compendium Project On-Line* (ISO), International Studies Association, forthcoming, 2010.

[3] Hampson, *Madness in the Multitude*, p. 12.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990519 Published online by Cambridge University Press

disease, hunger, environmental contamination or criminal violence. And for others, a greater threat may come from their own state itself, rather than from an 'external' adversary. Human security thus seeks to challenge attitudes and institutions that privilege so-called 'high politics' above individual experiences of deprivation and insecurity. This is not to presume that human security is necessarily in conflict with state security; the state remains the central provider of security in ideal circumstances. Human security does, however, suggest that international security traditionally defined – territorial integrity – does not necessarily correlate with human security, and that an over-emphasis upon state security can be to the detriment of human welfare needs. So, traditional conceptions of state security are a necessary but not sufficient condition of human welfare. The citizens of states – such as Bangladesh – that are 'secure' according to the traditional concept of security can be personally perilously insecure to a degree that demands a reappraisal of the concept of security.

Human security also raises important implications for the evolution of state sovereignty. Traditionally, state sovereignty and sovereign legitimacy rest upon a government's control of territory, state independence and recognition by other states. The role of citizens is to support this system. The human security approach reverses this equation: the state – and state sovereignty – must serve and support the people from which it (in theory) draws its legitimacy. The concept of 'conditional sovereignty' has therefore taken on a renewed importance through human security: the international legitimacy of state sovereignty rests not only on control of territory, but also upon fulfilling certain standards of human rights and welfare for citizens. As a corollary, the sovereignty of states that are unwilling or unable to fulfil certain basic standards may be questionable.

All approaches to human security agree that the referent of security policy and analysis should be the individual, but they disagree about which threats the individual should be protected from, and what means should be employed to achieve this protection. There are essentially four different strands – or usages – of human security, the first three of which are inspired by policy concerns. The first approach to human security is broad; it considers all threats to human integrity including – and sometimes especially – underdevelopment, poverty and deprivation.[4] This approach is a testament to the importance of development in the emergence of human security thinking. The 1994 UNDP Human Development Report popularised, and is representative of, this approach: human security 'means, first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities'.[5] This broad development-oriented approach to human security has found support in policy circles, in particular the Japanese sponsored Commission on Human Security. The Commission's report defines human security as the protection of:

[4] Ramesh Thakur and Edward Newman, 'Introduction: Non-traditional security in Asia', in Ramesh Thakur and Edward Newman (eds), *Broadening Asia's Security Discourse and Agenda: Political, Social, and Environmental Perspectives* (Tokyo, UN University Press, 2004), pp. 1–15; Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy, *Human Security Concepts and Implications*; Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now – Report of the Commission on Human Security* (New York: UN Publications, 2003).

[5] United Nations Development Programme *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 23.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990519 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment. Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms – freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity.[6]

The broad approach to human security sacrifices analytical precision in favour of general normative persuasion: it focuses on the issues which undermine the life chances of the largest numbers of people. The reality is that, by far, the biggest killers in the world are extreme poverty, preventable disease, and the consequences of pollution. According to this approach, any conception of security which neglects this reality is conceptually, empirically and ethically inadequate.

The second approach to human security is narrower, and focuses on the human consequences of armed conflict and the dangers posed to civilians by repressive governments and situations of state failure.[7] Modern conflict reflects a high level of civil war and state collapse which has resulted in a high rate of victimisation and displacement of civilians, especially women and children. According to this approach to human security, conventional security analysis is woefully inadequate for describing and explaining the realities of armed conflict and its impact upon humanity.

The third approach – particularly in policy circles and amongst scholars interested in policy – uses human security as an umbrella concept for approaching a range of 'non-traditional' security issues – such as HIV/AIDS, drugs, terrorism, small arms, inhumane weapons such as anti-personnel landmines, and trafficking in human beings – with the simple objective of attracting greater attention and resources for tackling them.[8] In this usage there is little effort made to contribute to theory. Indeed, re-labelling such challenges rarely helps to deepen understanding of the nature of these diverse phenomena. The overriding objective is to raise the visibility of neglected problems and to influence policy.

Finally, a small number of scholars – who reflect both the broad and narrow approaches to human security – are attempting to understand human security from a theoretical perspective and integrate human security into security studies.[9] From this perspective, human security is deployed to explore theoretical debates

[6] Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now*, p. 4.

[7] Andrew Mack, 'A Signifier of Shared Values', *Security Dialogue*, 35:3 (2004), pp. 366–7; S. Neil MacFarlane and Yuen Foong Khong, *Human Security and the UN: A Critical History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

[8] Felix Dodds and Tim Pippard, *Human and Environmental Security: An Agenda for Change* (London: Earthscan, 2005); M. Leen, *The European Union, HIV/AIDS and Human Security* (Dublin: Dochas, 2004); Adil Najam, *Environment, Development and Human Security: Perspectives from South Asia* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003); L. Chen, J. Leaning and V. Narasimhan (eds), *Global Health Challenges for Human Security* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); R. L. Callaway and J. Harrelson-Stephens, 'Toward a theory of terrorism: Human security as a determinant of terrorism', *Studies in Conflicts and Terrorism*, 29:8 (2006), pp. 773–96.

[9] Paul Roe, 'The 'value' of positive security', *Review of International Studies*, 34:4 (2008), pp. 777–94; Edward Newman, 'Human Security and Constructivism', *International Studies Perspectives*, (2:3) (2001), pp. 239–51; Giorgio Shani, Makoto Sato and Mustapha Kamal Pasha (eds), *Protecting Human Security in a Post 9/11 World: Critical and Global Insights* (London: Palgrave, 2007); Caroline Thomas, 'Global governance and human security', in Rorden Wilkinson and S. Hughes (eds), *Global Governance. Critical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2002); Kyle Grayson, 'The Biopolitics of Human Security', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 21:3 (2008), pp. 383–401.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990519 Published online by Cambridge University Press

concerning the nature of security threats, referents, and responses to insecurity. This literature raises questions about the sources of insecurity, the nature of the institutions which provide security, and the interests served by them. Within this approach, a small but important focus is upon the gendered aspects of security and insecurity.[10] This suggests that conditions of deprivation can only be understood with reference with gender relations and masculine institutions of power. As Thomas suggests, insecurity results 'directly from existing power structures that determine who enjoys the entitlement to security and who does not.'[11] As will be explored below, however, security studies – both conventional and 'critical' – has not provided a hospitable environment for those interested in the potential theoretical contributions of human security. Moreover, scholars interested in human security have been insufficiently critical and insufficiently reflective.

A defining characteristic of human security scholarship is its policy relevance, its engagement with policy, and its desire to change security policy in 'progressive' ways. The popularity of the concept since the 1990s – at least in the policy world – is partly attributable to the work of the UN Development Programme and other UN agencies, including UNESCO and the UN University. A number of human security initiatives have been led by government-sponsored organisations, such as the Commission on Human Security, the Human Security Trust Fund, and the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). The concept has also been adopted as an embryonic foreign policy framework. The Human Security Network is a loose grouping of thirteen governments committed – at least in a declaratory sense – to a number of foreign policy principles, including people-centred development and addressing the sources of insecurity.[12] The activist aspect is also embraced by some in the academic world who proclaim that human security is ultimately about justice and dignity: 'We are scholars who want to change the world.'[13]

A further characteristic of the human security approach is that it seeks to securitise issues as it broadens its approach to security. In addition to observing individuals as the referent object of security, human security seeks to view any critical and widespread challenge to the physical integrity of the individual as a security threat. According to the broad approach to human security, an extremely wide range of issues – including poverty and malnutrition, disease, environmental degradation and climate change – are securitised. The objective of this is explicitly to encourage security providers – and specifically the state – to invest the attention and resources necessary to address these non-traditional security challenges. Of course, scholars engaged in other non-traditional security approaches are wary of securitising challenges as the solution and argue that this carries with it its own pathologies.

[10] Ian Gibson and Betty Reardon 'Human Security: Toward Gender Inclusion?', in Shani, Sato and Pasha (eds), *Protecting Human Security in a Post 9/11 World*; David Roberts, *Human Insecurity: Global Structures of Violence* (London, Zed Books, 2008); Thanh-Dam Truong, Saskia Wieringa and Amrita Chhachhi (eds), *Engendering Human Security*.

[11] Caroline Thomas, *Global Governance, Development and Human Security* (London: Pluto, 2000), p. 4.

[12] As of 2009 membership included: Austria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Slovenia, South Africa (observer), Switzerland and Thailand. See {http://www.humansecuritynetwork.org/}.

[13] Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy, *Human Security Concepts and Implications*, p. 5.

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Definition debate and the problem of analytical value

Human security is normatively attractive, but analytically weak. Through a broad human security lens, anything that presents a critical threat to life and livelihood is a security threat, whatever the source. If individual security is the dependent variable, then it is possible to identify and codify every physiological threat. But this would be of little use, as it would generate an unmanageable array of variables. At the same time, arbitrarily drawing lines to include and exclude certain types of threats is problematic. The academic treatment of human security has foundered upon this fundamental conceptual point. If there is disagreement on what should be included as a human security threat – or if this is an arbitrary judgement – then how can human security or variations in human security be reliably measured? How, therefore, can human security be analytically useful?

The broad approach to human security – which includes social and economic afflictions – has attracted the greatest degree of criticism in this regard. Critics have argued that the broad approach is so inclusive – in considering potentially *any* threat to human safety – that as a concept it becomes meaningless. It does not allow scholars or policy makers to prioritise different types of threats, it confuses sources and consequences of insecurity, and it is too amorphous to allow analysis with any degree of precision. As Keith Krause argues:

> the broad vision of human security is ultimately nothing more than a shopping list; it involves slapping the label of human security on a wide range of issues that have no necessary link, and at a certain point, human security becomes a loose synonym for 'bad things that can happen'. At this point, it loses all utility to policymakers – and incidentally to analysts – since it does not allow us to see what is distinctive about the idea of 'security' [. . .][14]

Mack agrees that 'Conflating a very broad range of disparate harms under the rubric of "insecurity" is an exercise in re-labeling that serves no apparent analytic purpose'.[15] MacFarlane and Khong argue that the 'conceptual overstretch' of the broad definition of human security makes it 'meaningless and analytically useless'.[16] Buzan has echoed these observations.[17] MacFarlane and Khong also deny that rebranding development, the environment or health as security challenges has produced a greater flow of resources to addressing them; such a relabeling may therefore, in addition to the conceptual confusion, also produce false hopes.[18] In the meantime, more 'important' security challenges may lose the priority they deserve. Followers of human security have engaged in unresolved debates about the broad versus narrow definitions and the consequences of securitisation.[19]

[14] Keith Krause, 'Is Human Security "More than Just a Good Idea?"', in M. Brzoska and P. J. Croll (eds), *Promoting Security: But How and For Whom? Contributions to BICC's Ten-year Anniversary Conference* BICC brief 30 (2004), p. 44.
[15] Andrew Mack, 'A Signifier of Shared Values', p. 49.
[16] MacFarlane and Yuen Foong Khong, *Human Security and the UN*, pp. 237, 247.
[17] Barry Buzan, 'A Reductionist, Idealistic Notion that Adds Little Analytical Value', *Security Dialogue*, 35:3 (2004), pp. 369–70.
[18] MacFarlane and Yuen Foong Khong, *Human Security and the UN*, p. 17.
[19] *Security Dialogue*, Special Section: What is Human Security? Various authors, 35:3 (2004), pp. 345–72; Taylor Owen, 'Human Security – Conflict, Critique and Consensus: Colloquium Remarks and a Proposal for a Threshold-Based Definition', *Security Dialogue,* 35:3 (2004), pp. 373–87; Nicholas Thomas and William T. Tow, 'The Utility of Human Security: Sovereignty and Human Intervention', *Security Dialogue*, 33:2 (2002), pp. 177–92; Alex J. Bellamy and Matt McDonald,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990519 Published online by Cambridge University Press

There have been attempts to overcome the definitional debate. King and Murray, for example, proposed a quantitative model of human security based upon the 'number of years of future life spent outside a state of generalized poverty'.[20] Roberts has suggested a quantitative measure of human insecurity in terms of 'avoidable civilian deaths.'[21] Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy have argued that human security must necessarily embrace a broad range of threats because threats are intrinsically linked.[22] Others have suggested that the definition of human security should not be preoccupied with broad and narrow models; instead, the definition should be based upon a threshold. According to this, threats are regarded as *security* challenges when they reach a certain threshold of human impact, whatever the source. An attempt to articulate a threshold-based definition of human security is the following:

> Human security is concerned with the protection of people from critical and life-threatening dangers, regardless of whether the threats are rooted in anthropogenic activities or natural events, whether they lie within or outside states, and whether they are direct or structural.
>
> It is 'human-centered' in that its principal focus is on people both as individuals and as communal groups. It is 'security oriented' in that the focus is on freedom from fear, danger and threat.[23]

For a large number of people interested in promoting human security as a normative movement, the definition debate is incidental. They have a simple objective: to improve the lives of those who are perilously insecure. Conceptual or analytical coherence is not essential for this task. But in the world of scholarship the differences between a broad and narrow approach have undermined the unity of human security. Attempts to overcome this – for example through a threshold approach – have not as yet resolved this debate. But the debate itself is an interesting space for considering competing visions of security and international politics, and the study of these. As such, what is sometimes dismissed as a fruitless and interminable debate about the definition of human security is actually a creative process.

The relationship between human security and other non-traditional security studies

Non-traditional and critical security studies (broadly defined, and distinct from human security scholarship) also challenges the neorealist orthodoxy as a starting point, although generally from a more sophisticated theoretical standpoint than found in the human security literature. Critical approaches challenge most, or all, of the key features of (neo)realism: its emphasis upon parsimony and coherence; its privileging of a rational, state centric worldview based upon the primacy of

'"The Utility of Human Security": Which Humans? What Security? A Reply to Thomas and Tow', *Security Dialogue*, 33:3 (2002), pp. 373–7; Grayson, 'The Biopolitics of Human Security'.

[20] Gary King and Christopher Murray, 'Rethinking Human Security', *Political Science Quarterly*, 116:4 (2001–2), pp. 585–610.

[21] Roberts, *Human Insecurity*.

[22] Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy, *Human Security Concepts and Implications*.

[23] Ramesh Thakur and Edward Newman, 'Introduction: Non-traditional security in Asia', in Ramesh Thakur and Edward Newman (eds), *Broadening Asia's Security Discourse and Agenda: Political, Social, and Environmental Perspectives* (Tokyo, UN University Press, 2004), p. 4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990519 Published online by Cambridge University Press

military power in an anarchic environment; its emphasis upon order and predictability as positive values; and its structural view of international politics as ahistorical, recurrent, and non-contextual. Critical approaches to security studies also tend to challenge the ontology and epistemology of realism: the foundational starting point and assumptions of what the key features of the world are, what we should be studying, and how to generate reliable, legitimate knowledge. Critical approaches thus generally reject positivist, universalising knowledge claims and value-free 'truth'; some critical approaches go further, arguing that knowledge is always socially contingent. According to this, security is not an objective or apolitical condition; it is a subjectively constructed concept.[24] Smith suggests that 'the concept of security is essentially contested.'[25] There is 'no neutral place to stand to pronounce on the meaning of the concept of security, all definitions are theory-dependent, and all definitions reflect normative commitments'.[26] Therefore, the orthodox idea of security belonging to the state and the military is a biased construction, which can and should be challenged. Critical approaches also challenge the material preoccupation of realism, which confines its analysis to the measurement of physical variables and ignores ideational factors. Following from this, some branches of critical security studies do not necessarily see analytical coherence as the primary objective. It goes without saying that critical approaches also challenge the 'problem-solving' of realist approaches: the assumption and acceptance of existing parameters and norms in addressing security challenges.

A brief summary of the principal debates within critical security studies follows, because this is relevant to the future of human security within international studies. There have been two processes or strands to non-traditional security studies. Broadening security approaches argue that threats to security should not be confined to statist, military challenges.[27] They should be extended to include, for example, economic and environmental security challenges. Deepening approaches challenge the state as the referent object, and explore ontological and epistemological debates which seek to deepen understanding of security. Deepening entails understanding the values within which ideas of security are embedded. Some critical approaches – such as the collection produced by Krause and Williams, *Critical Security Studies* – are basically deconstructionist, in a tentative sense of unpacking and problematising prevailing understandings of security.[28] They identify the limitations and contradictions of orthodox security studies and international relations theory and point the way to a better understanding of what security means. Others propose a more coherent – and consciously alternative – agenda.

However, beyond a common opposition to neorealism, the non-traditional and critical approaches to security often fundamentally diverge. In particular, they

[24] Michael Sheehan, *International Security. An Analytical Survey* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2005) pp. 177–8.
[25] Steve Smith, 'The Contested Concept of Security', in Ken Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Renner, 2005), p. 27.
[26] Smith, 'The Contested Concept of Security', p. 28.
[27] B. Buzan, O. Waever and J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998); Keith Krause and Michael Williams, 'Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies: Politics and Methods', *Mershon International Studies Review*, 40:2 (1996), pp. 229–54; Keith Krause and M. Williams, *Critical Security Studies: concepts and Cases* (London: UCL Press, 1997).
[28] Krause, K. and M. Williams, *Critical Security Studies.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990519 Published online by Cambridge University Press

differ on what the referent object of security should be, whether the objective should be to securitise or desecuritise (and the implications of this), and whether the emphasis should be on normative or explanatory theory. Some non-traditional approaches retain the state as the referent object of study, and broaden their analysis of the threats to the state, to include – for example – economic, societal, environmental, and political security challenges. Barry Buzan's landmark book, *People, States and Fear*, suggested that the individual is the 'irreducible base unit' for explorations of security but the referent of security must remain the state as it is the central actor in international politics and the principal agent for addressing insecurity.[29]

Other critical approaches challenge the state-centricity of security analysis fundamentally, and argue that individuals or humans collectively should be the referent object of security. For Booth: 'A critical theory of security seeks to denaturalize and historicize all human-made political referents, recognizing only the primordial entity of the socially embedded individual.'[30] He continues: 'The only transhistorical and permanent fixture in human society is the individual physical being, and so this must naturally be the ultimate referent in the security problematique'.[31]

A further distinction concerns the consequences of treating an issue as a security threat, which raises the question of negative and positive securitisation. Some scholars – inspired by what became known as the 'Copenhagen School' – challenge the securitisation process because this process moves issues from 'normal' (accountable/democratic) politics to 'emergency' politics. Securitisation thus mobilises exceptional resources and political powers which are not necessarily positive or proportionate to the security challenges, and are sometimes manipulated for political purposes in order to create fear or curtail freedoms. Thus, securitisation studies 'aims to gain an increasingly precise understanding of who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent objects), why, with what results, and, not least, under what conditions (that is, what explains when securitization is successful'.[32] According to such an approach, securitising an issue – for example refugees – does not necessarily result in positive outcomes for the human rights of such people.[33] This approach has been successfully applied to a number of political challenges – such as conflict resolution – in order to demonstrate how securitisation has exacerbated fears and anxieties and entrenched conflict, and how desecuritisation can provide incentives for accommodation and cooperation.

Other critical approaches to security studies suggest the opposite: that broadening securitisation will broaden 'real' security (and bring resources and

[29] Barry Buzan, *People, states and fear: the national security problem in international relations* (Brighton, Sussex: Wheatsheaf, 1983).
[30] Ken Booth, 'Beyond Critical Security Studies', in Ken Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Renner, 2005), p. 268.
[31] Booth, 'Beyond Critical Security Studies', p. 264.
[32] Buzan, Waever and de Wilde *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, p. 32.
[33] Astri Suhrke, 'Human security and the protection of refugees', in Edward Newman and Joanne van Selm (eds), *Refugees and Forced Displacement: International Security, Human Vulnerability, and the State* (Tokyo: UNU Press, 2003); Ole Waever, Barry Buzan, M. Kelstrup and P. Lemaitre, *Identity, Migration, and the New Security Order in Europe* (London, Pinter, 1993); Maggie Ibrahim, 'The securitization of migration: A racial discourse', *International Migration* 43:5 (2005), pp. 163–87.

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attention) to a wider range of problems and actors, beyond the state. In this way, the 'Welsh School' has a more positive view of security, in common with human security approaches.[34]

Non-traditional approaches to security also differ in their normative approach. The 'Copenhagen School' has been described as primarily descriptive and explanatory in orientation. For quite different reasons some anti-foundational and deconstructionist post-modern readings claim that normative claims are baseless because there are no legitimate means of prescribing alternative policy frameworks. In contrast, the Welsh School is strongly normative, seeing security as a means to emancipation: 'freeing people, as individuals and collectivities, from contingent and structural oppressions'.[35] This approach to critical security studies has a self-consciously reflectivist epistemology, and in some ways sees security as socially – and intersubjectively – constructed and thus contingent on power relations. Booth and Jones believe that critical security theory should follow the Frankfurt School of critical social theory.[36] They emphasise the potential for change in human relations, explicitly rejecting the determinism of realism *and* promoting alternative objectives for 'security'. Booth thus draws parallels between realism and post-modernism: 'Political realists and poststructuralists seem to share a fatalistic view that humans are doomed to insecurity; regard the search for emancipation as both futile and dangerous; believe in a notion of the human condition; and relativize norms. Both leave power where it is in the world: deconstruction and deterrence are equally static theories.'[37]

Human security has generally not been treated seriously within these academic security studies debates, and it has not contributed much either. The dissonance between orthodox neorealist security studies and human security is hardly a mystery. But why is critical security studies inhospitable towards human security? If critical security studies argues that 'security only makes sense if individual human beings are seen as its primary referent, or subject',[38] why have critical security studies not taken notice of human security, which has the same goal? Booth asks: 'why should certain issues – human rights, economic justice and so on – be kept off the security agenda? They are, after all, crucial security questions for somebody, if not for those benefiting from statist power structures.'[39] It is exactly the question asked by those interested in human security. A critical theory approach to security involves 'de-essentializing and deconstructing prevailing claims about security'.[40] Human security approaches seek to do the same, albeit

[34] R. W. Jones, *Security, Strategy and Critical Theory* (Boulder Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publications, 1999); Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*.

[35] Ken Booth, 'Emancipation: prologue', in Ken Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Renner, 2005); Ken Booth, 'Security and Emancipation', *Review of International Studies* 17:4 (1991), pp. 313–26.

[36] Jones, *Security, Strategy and Critical Theory*; Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*.

[37] Ken Booth, 'Beyond Critical Security Studies', in Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, pp. 270–71.

[38] Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity, and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 208.

[39] Ken Booth, 'Security and Self: Reflections of a Fallen Realist', in Keith Krause and Michael Williams (eds), *Critical Security Studies. Concepts and Cases* (London: UCL Press, 1997), p. 111.

[40] Michael C. Williams and Keith Krause, 'Preface: Toward Critical Security Studies', in Krause and Williams (eds), *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*, p. xiv.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990519 Published online by Cambridge University Press

without the conceptual sophistication. Why, in turn, is human security literature negligent of critical security studies and preoccupied with policy relevance? Within the 'increasing insecurity in security studies',[41] what explains the differences between human security and critical security?

Explaining the lack of engagement between human security and critical security studies

A number of factors explain this lack of engagement. Firstly, the contributions of human security – such as the challenge to conventional state-centric military models of security – are already subsumed within critical security studies, and thus may be superfluous as a distinct field of study. When they do take notice of human security, analysts in the critical security studies field have tended to view it as a part of the economic security realm, and as a focus for demonstrating the link between development and conflict.[42] According to this reasoning, other theoretical approaches adequately accommodate this perspective – with greater conceptual sophistication – and so there is no need to give much attention to human security. Is human security, then, merely a set of uncritical ideas that are all addressed within critical security studies, albeit without the human security label? Is human security a kind of critical security studies-*lite*? The conceptual underdevelopment of human security, and its failure to adequately situate itself in security studies, makes it a poor relative of critical security studies, and in turn explains its failure to make an impact. The analytical limitations discussed earlier – and the unresolved debate between narrow and broad approaches – contribute to this theoretical weakness.

Secondly, the policy orientation of human security – and its adoption as a policy framework by some governments, such as Japan and at one time Canada – has made critical security scholars suspicious of human security as a hegemonic discourse. Human security scholarship tends to be pragmatic about finding solutions. It challenges the primacy of the state but is willing to concede the reality of state power and to work with the state to find solutions. Indeed, human security scholarship tends to be essentially open-minded in a liberal sense regarding the state; it believes that the state, if properly constituted, *can* work in the interests of people. This is in contrast to certain critical approaches which are inherently and intrinsically suspicious of the state. They are therefore in turn suspicious of human security as a state-sponsored movement; they instinctively believe that state elites are unlikely to be truly committed to promoting human welfare because the state is complicit in structural injustices from which it is unwilling or unable to extricate itself. Booth thus suggests that the concept of human security has been co-opted and incorporated into statist discourses, undermining its integrity and legitimising the business-as-usual of hegemony and privation; 'human security has taken on the

[41] Steve Smith, 'The Increasing Insecurity of Security Studies: Conceptualizing Security in the Last Twenty Years', in Stuart Croft and Terry Terriff (eds), *Critical Reflections on Security and Change* (London: Frank Cass, Smith 2000).

[42] Sheehan, *International Security,* pp. 75–80; Steve Smith, 'The Contested Concept of Security', in Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, p. 54.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990519 Published online by Cambridge University Press

image of the velvet glove on the iron hand of hard power.'[43] It allows states to 'tick the "good international citizen" box of foreign policy, but without significantly changing their behaviour'.[44] Grayson also claims that 'Human security's incitement to discourse is infused with a set of power-relations predisposed towards the ontological, epistemological, and analytic status quo.'[45] It is therefore interesting that, according to Booth, scholars writing from a realist perspective are more likely than critical academics to endorse the governmental approach to human security.[46] According to this critical line of reasoning, human security can never overcome its central paradox: it apparently calls for a critique of the structures and norms that produce human insecurity, yet the ontological starting point of most human security scholarship and its policy orientation reinforce these structures and norms.

In addition, when states do deploy the human security motif, there is a danger that it is to form a pretext for hegemonic and interventionist – even military – policies. The concern is that at best these are well intentioned but ethnocentric and paternalistic adventures, and at worst human security can be a pretext for outright power politics. As Shani argues, there is a concern that human security 'may be sufficiently malleable to allow itself to be used to legitimize greater state control over society in the *name of protection*.'[47]

In a related manner, human security has become controversial in some policy circles, and is now seen by some states as a form of Western hegemony and liberal cultural imperialism.[48] This is illustrated by the association between human security and 'humanitarian intervention' and the changing norms regarding state sovereignty and human rights. Referring to the controversial use of military force in 1999, Lloyd Axworthy, Canada's former foreign minister, suggested: 'the crisis in Kosovo, and the Alliance's response to it, is a concrete expression of this human security dynamic at work [. . .]'[49] Even the former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, known to support the human security idea, described a 'developing international norm in favour of intervention to protect civilians from wholesale slaughter and suffering and violence', and linked this to the human security idea.[50] For these and other reasons some governments are sensitive about the human security label and even object to its use in multilateral forums. In the UN, secretariat staff members have learned to avoid the term even though they promote the key messages of human security.[51]

There have also been concerns that the policy community's use of the human security idea is distorting its true meaning and – more mischievously – being deployed as a cover for dubious political objectives. The Philippine Human

[43] Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 324.
[44] Booth, *Theory of World Security*, pp. 323–4.
[45] Grayson, 'The Biopolitics of Human Security'.
[46] Booth, *Theory of World Security*, p. 326.
[47] Giorgi Shani, 'Introduction', in Shani, Sato and Pasha (eds), *Protecting Human Security in a Post 9/11 World,* p. 7.
[48] Ikechi Mgbeoji, 'The civilised self and the barbaric other: Imperial delusions of order and the challenges of human security', *Third World Quarterly* 27:5 (2006), pp. 855–869.
[49] Lloyd Axworthy, 'Canada and Human Security: The Need for Leadership', *International Journal*, 52:2 (1997), pp. 183–96.
[50] Kofi Annan, Speech of the UN Secretary-General to the General Assembly, 20 September, 1999. New York: United Nations, 1999.
[51] Edward Newman, 'Human Security: Mainstreamed Despite the Conceptual Ambiguity?', *St. Antony's International Review*, 1:2 (2005), pp. 24–36.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990519 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Security Act of 2007, for example, is essentially an 'anti-terror law' which would warrant special counter-terrorism measures and – according to critics – encroach upon human rights. Less controversially, the EU has embraced the human security concept for some of its external relations issues – including peacekeeping – which is an application which also raises connotations of a 'liberal' vision of how the world should be organised. (Yet some scholars have suggested that human security has Asian roots).[52]

A final implication of the policy orientation of human security is provided by Astri Surhke (2004). She suggests that academic interest in human security has followed from policy initiatives. The policy world's support of human security is fickle; Canada, for example, once a high-profile champion of the concept, has conspicuously distanced itself from human security because it is associated with a previous government. If the policy world is losing interest in human security, will human security be able to independently survive as an academic pursuit?

Thirdly, human security scholarship has tended to be 'problem-solving'. This is an application of Robert Cox's famous analysis.[53] Problem-solving approaches take prevailing social relationships, and the institutions into which they are organised, as the given and inevitable framework for action. In contrast, critical approaches question how institutions emerge and the interests they represent and serve, and do not accept existing policy parameters as a given or necessarily legitimate. Most human security scholarship has been problem solving, largely because of its origins in foreign policy initiatives and amongst scholars interested in international organisations and development. Human security is in itself fundamentally 'critical', but this unfortunately is not how most human security arguments have been approached. They do not engage in epistemological, ontological or methodological debates; indeed, much human security work is seemingly ignorant of these debates, or finds them unnecessary. Human security generally adopts a policy oriented approach which attempts to improve human welfare within the political, legal and practical parameters of the 'real world'. According to this, human security scholarship seeks to generate new and persuasive policy-relevant insights whilst accepting the prevailing policy approaches and assumptions. Human security scholars do not tend to *fundamentally* question existing structures and institutions of power, gender, and distribution in relation to economic and political organisation (although there are a few notable exceptions).[54] Human security approaches would generally not support the argument that '"Security" is a socially constructed concept. It has a specific meaning only within a particular social context.'[55] Few scholars of human security would accept the idea that there is no basis for an objective understanding of 'security' or that there is no possibility of epistemic consensus on what 'security' means. Few would therefore see it as an 'essentially contested concept', in the sense suggested by

[52] Amitav Acharya, 'Human Security: East Versus West', *International Journal* LVI, 3 (2001), pp. 442–60; Paul Evans, 'A Concept Still on the Margins, but Evolving from its Asian Roots', *Security Dialogue*, 35:3 (2004), pp. 263–4.

[53] Robert Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium*, 10:2 (1981), pp. 126–55.

[54] Roberts, *Human Insecurity*; Shani, Sato and Pasha (eds), *Protecting Human Security in a Post 9/11 World*; Grayson, 'The Biopolitics of Human Security'; Thomas, 'Global governance and human security'.

[55] Sheehan, *International Security*, p. 43.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990519 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Gallie.[56] Human security scholarship, whilst promoting the individual as the referent object of security even when this is in tension with the state, is more likely to see a strong state as a necessary requirement for individual security. In so doing, human security does not problematise ontology, but – perhaps paradoxically – still claims to be emancipatory.

In contrast, critical approaches question 'reality' as a central part of their goal. They raise questions about existing policy assumptions and the interests they serve. Their approaches lead us to challenge existing constructions, such as state sovereignty, high politics, national interest, and even the concept of knowledge. Critical approaches question or challenge prevailing structures of power and power relations, and also prevailing discourses or ways of thinking. Post-structuralist analysis argues that objectivity is a myth; 'reality' is intersubjectively constituted and constructed. Not all critical security scholars go quite as far as this, but a critical view of the prevailing order and its institutions is central to their project. Critical approaches also require that we are self-critical: our own analytical approaches, consciously or unconsciously, privilege – and thus endorse and perpetuate – certain ways of thinking at the expense of others, and this may be represented in relationships of power. Critical security studies thus explicitly make a connection between structures of power and the way that these structures are represented in scholarship. For example, for Ken Booth, 'Realist-derived security studies continues to survive and flourish because the approach is congenial for those who prosper from the intellectual hegemony of a top-down, statist, power-centric, masculinised, ethnocentric, and militarized worldview of security.'[57] In contrast to the critical approaches to security studies, human security is therefore considered – and as a result generally dismissed – as 'uncritical' and unsophisticated by critical security scholars.

Human security scholars wish to remain policy relevant – and thus accessible to policy circles. As a result they have been reluctant to explore overtly 'critical' security studies themes, either because they feel these are unnecessary, or because they fear that such theoretical pursuits will alienate them – and their message – from the policy world. Many of the actors at the heart of the human security movement – both in scholarship and the policy world – have prioritised progress in human welfare above the objective of deepening understanding of complex concepts. The Report of the Commission on Human Security, and the Trust Fund for Human Security that followed the Commission, are explicit in this regard. The co-chair of the Commission, Sadako Ogata, was adamant that human security is about practical impact – that is, helping deprived people – not theorising. Critical security studies argue that a critical understanding – and deconstruction – of security is necessary for producing a brighter future in the long term. Most human security scholarship, whilst challenging prevailing notions of security, focuses upon and seeks to remedy the manifestations of insecurity as a priority and is willing to act in unison with existing institutions in order to do so. It is therefore primarily consequentialist, and less structurally revisionist than critical security studies.

[56] W. B. Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 56 (1956), pp. 167–98.
[57] Ken Booth, 'Critical Explorations', in Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, p. 9.

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Finally, and following the previous point, in addition to those promoting human security from government or multilateral circles, many scholars addressing human security challenges do so not from a 'theoretical' security studies background, but rather from areas which tend to be less 'critical' in approach, such as UN or development studies. This is reflected in a great deal of literature which – uncritically – attaches the theme of human security to a wide range of challenges and issues such as the environment, migration, development, health and medical epidemics, etc.[58] Generally, the argument is that these issues deserve a re-examination with greater attention given to individuals, with the hope that greater resources and attention will come from securitising these challenges.

Conclusion: Critical human security studies

Should we give up on human security as a distinct and an academically viable approach in security studies? Is it 'merely' a normative – and somewhat rhetorical, and sometimes dubious – policy movement? Or can human security offer something interesting to the study of security? The academic interest which exists in human security – albeit not within theoretical security studies – suggests that human security should not be dismissed.

Critical security studies – in not opening the door to human security or even substantively engaging with it – seems guilty of the sort of exclusionary analytical practices they claim exists in orthodox security studies. Moreover, claims that human security is analytically weak or difficult to define seem somewhat unfair from a non-traditional security studies perspective. Many of the analytical limitations of human security – such as the problem of drawing boundaries around security challenges or defining the field of study – could equally be levelled at critical and non-traditional security studies more generally. Human security analysis is certainly less theoretically self-conscious and less reflective regarding these limitations, but ultimately the issues are contested in all non-traditional approaches. All non-traditional security approaches – and not only orthodox security studies – are open to contestation. Non-traditional approaches should be open to a variety of approaches; coherence need not necessarily be the benchmark for acceptance to non-traditional security studies.

Critical security studies and human security could learn more from each other through engagement; human security scholarship could develop conceptually – which it needs to do – and critical security studies could come closer to its practical aspirations. As a movement which engages with policy makers, human security

[58] For example, Hans G. Brauch, *Environment and Human Security: Freedom from Hazard Impact*, Bonn: UNU Institute for Environment and Human Security, Intersections series, 2 (2005); A. McGrew and N. K. Poku, *Globalization, Development and Human Security* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); M. Glasius and M. Kaldor, (eds), *A Human Security Doctrine for Europe: Project, Principles, Practicalities* (London: Routledge, 2005); Albrecht Schnabel, 'Human Security and Conflict Prevention', in David Carment and Albrecht Schnabel (eds), *Conflict Prevention from Rhetoric to Reality: Opportunities and Innovations* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004); D. F. Anwar, 'Human Security: An Intractable Problem in Asia', in M. Alagappa (ed.), *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2003); M. S. Denoy, 'Wartime sexual violence: Assessing a human security response to war-affected girls in Sierra Leone', *Security Dialogue*, 37:3 (2006), pp. 319–42.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990519 Published online by Cambridge University Press

provides opportunities for non-traditional security ideas to have an impact upon policy, and this should be valued by critical security studies scholars. There are useful lessons to be learnt from human security, as a policy-oriented intellectual agenda which has sought to encourage political leaders and practitioners – in national ministries, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations – to orient their policies towards human needs. If critical security studies want to help in the 'real world', it should look at human security again and in particular look beyond some of the analytical weaknesses that it perceives in human security.

Human security is primarily 'problem-solving' and uncritical – apart from a few exceptions – which alienates it from critical security studies. The uncritical approach characteristic of much of human security may be a theoretical weakness from the perspective of critical security studies but it does bring human security closer to policy, and thus potentially more likely to influence policy (within a problem-solving paradigm). Critical security approaches – with the exception of outright anti-foundational and some post-modernists approaches – are normative and claim to be practical.[59] At the same time these same critical approaches are wary of engaging with policy analysts and practitioners because they are statist and uncritical; thus, a dialogue would inevitably amount to replicating old ways of thinking and undermine the integrity of the critical security agenda. The claim of critical security studies to be practical and policy relevant is problematic due to this reluctance to engage in problem-solving dialogue. This is a conundrum that critical security studies still need to address. Human security, from a problem-solving perspective, is more likely to be policy relevant, to be able to engage policy analysts and governments and influence policy. Human security can, therefore, be a conduit for promoting human-centred security thinking in the policy world. In this sense, its problem-solving approach might enable non-traditional security studies to make a positive impact upon people's lives, by engaging with and influencing policy, and by mobilising other social actors. The normative strands of critical security studies – such as the 'Welsh School', which claims to seek to change the world for the better – could therefore engage human security as a bridge between critical security studies and policy.

For its part, human security scholars do need to go beyond 'problem-solving' approaches. One way is to develop Critical Human Security Studies (CHSS), to consider if it is possible to be 'critical' – and thus accepted as a genuine non-traditional security contribution – *and* policy relevant. Indeed, to survive as a credible academic focus, CHSS may be the only way forward. CHSS might embrace some of the following future directions:

1 CHSS must confront some of the internal contradictions of the human security concept, in particular the analytical confusion which exists regarding the scope and nature of security, and the means of achieving security. These conceptual challenges need not be uniformly resolved – in fact the plurality of ideas has generated a welcome debate about the very substance of security and insecurity – but the terms of the debate need to be more rigorously explicated so that progress can be made in going beyond the stalled 'definition debate'.

[59] Sheehan, *International Security*, p. 159; Booth, 'Beyond Critical Security Studies', in Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, p. 260.

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2 In this conceptual development, CHSS needs to make a much clearer distinction between explanatory and normative theory. There are interesting avenues for both, but at present human security work does not make an adequate differentiation between what it claims the world *is like* and what it would like the world *to be like*. At the same time, human security scholarship needs to be more explanatory in a theoretical sense – in terms of generating persuasive explanations for the nature and consequences of security institutions – and go beyond normative advocacy claims.
3 CHSS must learn analytically from other critical security studies approaches. It must interrogate and problematise the values and institutions which currently exist as they relate to human welfare, and more thoroughly question the interests that are served by these institutions. This may involve the adoption of specifically 'critical' methodologies, such as discourse analysis, but it also simply means going deeper in a more general critical sense. For example, current scholarship on human security focuses on 'progressive' policy initiatives – such as the use of military force for human protection purposes, the movement to eliminate certain types of weapons and the movement to strengthen international criminal justice – without sufficiently exploring the pathologies inherent in the structure of the international system which give rise to these types of challenges. Problem-solving policy approaches, generally supported by human security scholars, may even promote human insecurity. For example, poverty alleviation and employment generation efforts by international financial institutions are generally welcomed from a human security perspective, but this must be approached within the broader liberal market context which (according to some analysts) arguably disempowers communities and results in social deprivation. This structural analysis is underdeveloped in human security scholarship, which tends to be excessively focussed on the manifestations of insecurity, whereas it needs to take a much greater interest in the underlying structural causes.
4 In addition to simply 'going deeper' into the layers of cause and effect, this conceptual development will also require that human security engages much more in debates about the ontology and epistemology of knowledge claims regarding the nature of security and insecurity. Only by doing this can scholarship seek to overcome the central paradox of human security, challenging as it does the structures and norms that produce human insecurity, yet in many ways reinforcing these structures and norms.
5 CHSS scholarship needs to make a more theoretically sophisticated attempt to explicate the structure–agency binary as it relates to the security discourse. Human security has at its core the individual as object. Some advocates of human security also identify the individual as the key vehicle for attaining security through empowerment.[60] Yet, much human insecurity surely results from structural factors and the distribution of power, which are essentially beyond the reach of individuals. Exploring the relationship between human agency and structure in solutions to human security challenges is a pressing next step in the human security discourse.

[60] Commission on Human Security.

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6 Progress also needs to be made in explicating the theoretical and practical relationship between the state and the individual in the provision of security (which, again, means consciously confronting the paradox of human security). Many threats to individual security emanate from predatory and abusive states, or state weakness and failure. Yet in human security scholarship the state is generally looked upon as the main provider – or potential provider – of individual security. This conundrum needs substantial further study. This relates to a further issue of agency which requires further study. Much human security scholarship consciously or unconsciously individualises security or assumes that the individual-state relationship is the fundamental binary. In reality, the individual is a social animal in various contexts and communities – not just the state – and so the individualisation of security is politically limited.
7 CHSS must relate human security arguments to broader debates in International Relations and political theory. This is something that conventional security studies have done in a rather narrow manner (most obviously in relation to neorealist theory). Human security has implications for a wide range of IR debates that will find fertile ground in scholarship and amongst students if they are properly engaged. The use of military force for human protection purposes in situations of civil war or state failure, economic justice, and the links between development and security are all debates into which CHSS can inject new stimuli, drawing upon its solidarist and cosmopolitan credentials. Human security ideas – and policy initiatives – also provide interesting material for constructivist research agendas.
8 A CHSS approach to foreign policy as it relates to human security should go beyond the preoccupation with 'Human Security', in capital letters. Scholarship should also focus on policy initiatives and discourse which promote a general advocacy of – and focus upon – individuals as the referent of security. In the policy world, this is where the true shift may be taking place, albeit without always using the 'Human Security' label. Does this trend suggest a significant change in foreign policy? Or is there a danger of human security being 'squeezed out' of the agenda in the post-9/11 world, as governments and scholars revert to more conventional models of security?

Judging by the growing number of publications, university courses and research centres focussing on human security, there is every sign that the theme is growing in popularity. Whilst there remains ambivalence towards the concept in the policy world and amongst many security studies scholars, many other academics and students believe that human security is a worthwhile focus. Whether they can persuade their more well-established colleagues in critical security studies to take the concept seriously depends on how far they are willing and able to theoretically develop human security.

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