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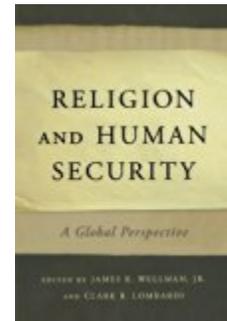


James K. Wellman, Clark Benner Lombardi, eds. *Religion and Human Security: A Global Perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. x + 332 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-982773-2; \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-982775-6.

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Mendelsohn on Wellman

Linking two analytical concepts in one edited volume is a proven way to provoke academic curiosity. This is especially so when religion, one of the most important subjects for social science research that has been inexcusably neglected until recently, is one of the two. Indeed, bringing religion together with a new and intriguing concept of human security, James K. Wellman and Clark B. Lombardi, the editors of *Religion and Human Security: A Global Perspective*, together with thirteen other prominent contributors, offer a unique and seminal work that crosses disciplinary boundaries and deepens our understanding of the relationship between these concepts.

Specifically, the participants of the project seek to promote the discussion of human security by demonstrating the various ways religious actors interact with it. This framing allows them to emphasize the undertheorized state of human security, while also presenting a nuanced picture of the role of religion in the social and political realms. Along the way, the authors of the book's sixteen chapters demonstrate that religion and religious non-state actors, are not necessarily threats to human security. *Religion and Human Security* delves into the differences between religious non-state actors and challenges the simplistic negative portrayal that religious non-state actors are inherently incompatible with human security. Thus, while the book can be seen as part of an emerging literature about the role of religion in domestic politics and international relations, which arose in the aftermath of the Cold War, it goes beyond simplistic de-

pications. In contrast with many works that discuss religion as a reactionary force which stands in conflict with modernity, or as the source of brutal, indiscriminate violence, *Religion and Human Security* seeks to present a more balanced view of the important and multidimensional roles religion plays in local and international politics.

Alongside chapters that focus on the violent manifestation of religion, the reader will find many chapters that describe more complex and often positive roles that religion and religious actors perform in peoples' lives and in society. Religious actors do not only commit acts of terrorism. In Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood filled the gap left by the state and proved capable of outperforming the Egyptian state in the provision of basic services (chap. 4). According to Jonathan Warren, in Brazil's marginalized areas popular religious traditions have generated a process of empowerment for the poor and the advancement of their human security (chap. 7). With such examples, the book's chapters demonstrate that many religious actors promote peaceful relations between communities and provide necessary goods. Consequently, the book plausibly conveys the idea that more often than common perceptions would suggest, religious non-state actors can be viewed as a force with great potential to promote human security. Rather than act as competitors with states, maliciously lurking in the shadows to undermine order and doom society to backwardness, religious non-state actors often fill the void states leave, encourage

a humanistic view, and provide numerous vital services, from charity-giving to security, that some states neglect.

It is this demonstrated variation in the types of relationships religious actors have with state authorities, co-religionists, members of other communities, and secular actors, that makes the volume a remarkable contribution to social science in general, and to the fields of international relations and comparative politics in particular. This value is bolstered by an impressive expansion of the repertoire of cases of religious non-state actors that includes illuminating examples from different religions and religious interpretations. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find another contribution that brings together such an array of countries, among them Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan, India, Brazil, Guatemala, Zimbabwe, Angola, Japan, Algeria, Northern Ireland, Romania, and Poland. However, as I will argue below, by linking the study of religious non-state actors to the question of human security, the book burdens itself with heavy weight that undercuts the whole enterprise. It is this emphasis on human security that ends up the main weakness of *Religion and Human Security*.

The concept of human security was developed during the 1990s. Its development in academic circles can be linked to scholars' re-engagement with the concept of security. The watershed events of the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the increase in ethnic conflicts were viewed by many scholars as both producing and reflecting a new international environment which requires rethinking and reconceptualizing security. While most scholars never completely rejected the traditional focus on the state as the main provider of security and producer of insecurity (both conceived primarily in the framework of interstate relations), many maintained that the concept of security must be expanded to include, among other things, sectors such as economic and environmental security.

In parallel, practitioners, particularly in the UN, viewed conditions as ripe for the promotion of a more expansive view of security, one emphasizing human security not simply as a theoretical concept but as an actual call for action. Proponents of this perspective believed that the post-Cold War era offered a unique opportunity to restructure international relations on more moral and humanistic foundations. Challenging the separation between state security and the security of individuals, proponents of the new paradigm maintained that state security cannot be guaranteed without the provision of human security. But they went further: the human security

framework not only facilitated the promotion of a human rights agenda, but also the significant expansion of what constitutes individual and communal rights.

Indeed, according to the authors of the book, people are "insecure" if they are in danger of physical harm or material want; if they are suffering grave violations of human rights; or if they feel alienated, psychologically distressed, or sociologically oppressed (p. 8). This conceptualization is extremely expansive. It includes not only political threats to the lives of individuals, but also threats to their physical well-being such as hunger or lack of access to health care. The second part of the definition of human security includes a controversial juridical element articulating a broad set of human rights. Finally, the last element is an elusive, culturally conditioned factor, normally referring to protection from threats to communal values.

Viewed in its very broad meaning, the prospect of realizing the human security agenda seems much more doubtful. Critical readers will probably agree that human security in this comprehensive sense can be achieved only in an ideal world. Human security would require mutual understanding and acceptance between all human beings, peaceful intentions of people and states, and the abandonment of aspirations for power, particularly as power to some often comes at the expense of others. A world with human security, even one that simply aspires to that kind of security, would be a much nicer place. It is just not the world we live in.

Whereas the academic challenges to the traditional concept of security, embodied in the work of the Copenhagen school, generated vigorous debates on the merits of the alternative understandings of security, the activists who pushed the concept of human security prioritized the promotion of an ideological agenda over analytical rigor. By seeking to change norms governing behavior within the international community in a very particular way, those ideologically committed to the human security agenda undermined the development of the concept, and diminished the likelihood of critical engagement, particularly a deep reflection on the concept's inherent contradictions. It would be unfair to accuse the contributors to the book of a blatant effort of ideological promotion; in fact, they all make admirable attempts at objective observation and analysis of their cases' subjects (this enterprise made somewhat easier due to the large number of experienced anthropologists among the chapters' writers). Nevertheless, despite their noble efforts, it is hard to ignore the book's ideological underpinnings.

In some ways, the use of the concept of human security by rights' activists (including those who hold positions in academic institutions) is somewhat ironic and counterproductive given the intriguing developments in the ways the concept of security has been used and abused by practitioners in the past decade. Prior to September 11 this discourse of security might have been a way to engage traditional security by maintaining that human security is a prerequisite for the achievement of state security. But in retrospect, reorienting the discourse of expanding basic human and communal rights toward a security-based conceptualization has been self-defeating on both analytical and discursive grounds. Ironically, at the same time that the contributors to *Religion and Human Security* seek to demonstrate how a broader security agenda could serve the public good, many in the academic community acknowledge the adverse effects of expanding the security agenda. In fact, Wellman and Lombardi's edited volume is out of sync with the wave of recent works which seek to alert us to the practice of securitization, particularly with regard to the alleged threat of terrorism. Indeed, many scholars in the field of international political sociology, and specifically students of critical terrorism studies, have written extensively about how almost overnight the threat of terrorism exposed previously autonomic spheres, such as immigration, to the discourse of security, allowing states to subvert human rights.

Therefore, the discourse of human security, while possibly an effective vehicle for the promotion of an agenda of liberal rights, comes with costs. In *Religion and Human Security* it becomes a double-edged sword as the book ends up legitimating the objectives of security and prioritizing them over the intrinsic value of the rights the human security agenda actually tries to promote. The authors end up securitizing freedom and expose themselves to various types of critique they are unlikely to appreciate. For example, if security could justify the promotion of expansive rights as conceptualized by the human security framework, one may find it difficult to separate the securitization of human rights, pluralism, and democracy by the authors from the efforts of President George W. Bush to promote his freedom agenda through military interventions.

Moreover, weak analytical underpinnings hinder the authors' efforts to make a robust theoretical contribution. For example, while the book demonstrates the various ways religious actors affect human security, it still does not tell us why human security would be a superior solution to the problem of state security. If prior to the

collapse of the Soviet Union, states' security and international stability were guaranteed by material factors, one wonders whether the achievement of these effects requires human security rather than merely a different distribution of material factors.

To the ideologically uncommitted reader, the inclinations of states, sub-state actors, and individuals to seek power have not changed. Any serious development of the human security framework would have to account for the alleged increased significance of human security and for the relationship between the quest for power in world politics and human security. To do so scholars must locate human security in a world that does not suffer simply from coordination problems where there are absolute gains to be obtained, but one that features many genuine clashes of interests and numerous zero-sum games. It is encouraging that many of the book's authors demonstrate through examples (unfortunately untheorized) how ubiquitous power is. Greater acknowledgement and more rigorous treatment of the role of power would have diminished the problematic sense that the book's main goal is to promote an ideological agenda rather than make a theoretical and analytical contribution to the study of world politics.

Enter religion. The authors of the various chapters recognize the ability of non-state religious actors to both promote human security and undermine it. While ultimately all such actors seek to promote an ideal model for human life, many prioritize members of their own religion and, even more specifically, people who adhere to their particular interpretations of appropriate and virtuous behavior. Not only is human security the right and promise of those who are members of the chosen religious group, but those who do not belong to this group are often denied these goods and rights—human security.

Throughout the book the authors acknowledge the negative impact certain interpretations of religions can have on human security. For example, Marat Somer warns in chapter 3 that religious actors in Turkey promote some values and beliefs that undercut freedoms and protections which are central to modern pluralistic democracies. Rowena Robinson highlights, in chapter 7, the marginalization and even repression of Muslim women in India. There are additional examples. However, overall, the authors of the book fail to sufficiently develop theoretically the conflict between human security and religion that sometimes comes out very clearly from the book chapters. The case studies may show how certain religious interpretations often result in discrimi-

nation against those who do not subscribe to the group's beliefs, that is, the undermining of human security for all "others." In some cases, authors even note that within particular religious communities the promotion of communal religious norms may conflict with personal human rights of members of the sect, primarily women. And yet, reifying a liberal view of human security, even the two theoretical chapters (chapters 1 and 2) avoid discussing the possibility that certain religious interpretations are simply incompatible with the book's view of human security. Moreover, some illiberal interpretations of religion may gain greater traction among their constituencies than more humanistic interpretations would.

Furthermore, whereas the problem of the marginalization of women in many religions is not totally ignored, the authors try to leave their readers with the sense that a solution in which both individual and communal rights and norms are compatible is feasible. For example, while still repressed Muslim women in India are exploring ways to interact with the community's religious leadership and to promote women rights as part of communal rights (pp. 122-128). There may be religious communities where the gap between individual and religious communal rights could be closed, but the prospect that religious revival could work in the opposite direction, though an unappealing message, must receive greater emphasis in the book. Moreover, the book's contribution would have been strengthened if it addressed more realistically how individual and communal religious values could be brought together. This objective may require theorizing the properties of diverse religious actors and their attitudes toward specific values. We should also compare them to secular groups, examine the ways they interact, and assess the conditions under which one set of actors is likely to succeed in promoting its agenda while discrediting that of others.

The absence of an ambitious theoretical development is offset to some extent by the impressive breadth of the

book's case studies. And yet, it also amplifies the sense of a missed opportunity. We can imagine how much the book would be enhanced if its chapters reflected a conscious research design instead of an eclectic selection which limits the chapters' contribution to theory building. For example, a conscious choice to examine religious actors who operate in countries that identify themselves with certain creeds would have been beneficial. Chapters on Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel could have strengthened the book. Moreover, it would have been useful to compare such cases with others where religious actors operate within constitutionally secular states. A comparison between religious and secular non-state actors who seek to provide human security is another direction that could have helped flesh out the links between religion and human security by demonstrating the unique qualities of religious providers of human security. Absent such comparison the groups discussed in the chapters appear no different than any other organization. It is unfortunate given that the content of the identity and ideology of these groups must be central to their functioning.

Religion and Human Security is a significant contribution to the literature on both subjects. One hopes that future works will build on its insights in a more rigorous way to address many theoretically and empirically puzzling questions rising from it. The book leaves us eager to know more about topics such as: the operation of strong versus weak religious actors; the provision of social versus political goods; the differing roles and levels of success of religious and non-religious actors who are committed to the provision of human security; the operation of religious actors in a multireligious environment versus an arena with one dominant religion; and the dynamics that characterizes the action of religious non-state actors operating in secular states versus their function in states with particular religious identities. Even if just by offering such inspiration *Religion and Human Security* should be evaluated positively.

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