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Zwierlein, Cornel; Graf, Rüdiger

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The Production of *Human Security* in Premodern and Contemporary History

Cornel Zwierlein & Rüdiger Graf*

Abstract: »Die Produktion von *Human Security* in Vormoderne und Zeitgeschichte«. Since the end of the Cold War, Human Security has become an important approach in international politics, law, and political science. In contrast to the so-called ‘Westphalian System’ that knows only states as subjects and objects of security, human security aims at the security of individual human beings if failed or failing states do not protect them nor provide for their basic needs. Thereby, such heterogeneous forms of security as security from war, food security, energy security or security from crime and traffic accidents become common problems of international politics. Developing this new concept of security, UN documents as well as some experts suggest that the extended concept of security is a recurrence of the premodern concept of security that prevailed before the clear-cut distinction between domestic and international politics and the evolution of the system of states. This introduction discusses contributions on the premodern and contemporary history of (human) security and tries to assess the heuristic potential of the concept for historical research.

Keywords: Human security, History of security regimes, intertemporal comparison, interepochal comparison, new medievalism, Westphalian system, failing states.

The concept of *human security* was introduced at the level of global politics and the United Nations in the 1990s and is intended to complement the traditional concept of *state security*, but can also stand in opposition to it. *Human security* demands that the policies of international organizations must be directed towards the protection of individual human beings, that their security and basic rights must be more than just a side-effect of the protection of borders, governments and the sovereignty of countries against external violence. *Human security* emerged as a central category in debates on security policies after the Cold War and often alludes to a new postmodern and postnational age. While social and political scientists as well as experts on international law intensively debate the concept and its policy implications, historians rarely touch on it. In this special issue of *Historical Social Research*, historians explicitly deal with “human security” as both an object of study and, to a certain

* Address all communications to: Cornel Zwierlein, Faculty of History, Ruhr-University Bochum, Universitätsstraße 150, 44780 Bochum, Germany; e-mail: cornel.zwierlein@rub.de.
Rüdiger Graf, Faculty of History, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Universitätsstraße 150, 44780 Bochum, Germany; e-mail: ruediger.graf@rub.de.

extent, a heuristical device of historical research combining the social and political sciences with specifically historical approaches.

The *Human Development Report* of 1994, the first official UN document to introduce the concept, defined security as “safety from the constant threats of hunger, disease, crime, and repression. It also means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the pattern of our daily lives – whether in our homes, in our jobs, in our communities or in our environments”. Consequently it enumerated “job security, income security, health security, environmental security, security from crime” as the “emerging concerns of human security all over the world” – a catalogue that is broad but not exhaustive.¹ The *Human Development Report* was intended as preparation for the Social Development Summit of 1995 and, consequently, tried to combine the new formula of development policy, “sustainable development”,² with a new concept of security. Therefore, issues from the agenda of development policies were implicitly labeled as security issues. This process or strategy of the securitization of development issues (intentionally) raised attention to the threats to security in everyday life. A couple of years later, in 2003, the *Commission on Human Security* which had been formed in the meantime explained the shift towards “human security” as follows:

The international community urgently needs a new paradigm of security. Why? Because the security debate has changed dramatically since the inception of state security advocated in the 17th century. According to that traditional idea, the state would monopolize the rights and means to protect its citizens. State power and state security would be established and expanded to sustain order and peace. But in the 21st century, both the challenges to security and its protectors have become more complex. The state remains the fundamental purveyor of security. Yet it often fails to fulfill its security obligations – and at times has even become a source of threat to its own people. That is why attention must now shift from the security of the state to the security of the people – to human security.³

Secure living conditions away from slums, security in the face of natural and human-made catastrophes, security against violence, criminality, the effects of civil war or even the effects of badly coordinated road traffic are objects of *human security* policy, of NGOs as well as of broader initiatives such as the United Nations Human Settlement Programme. Framing all these issues under the comprehensive concept of security allows the UN to assume responsibility; moreover, it increasingly blurs the once clear distinction between domestic and foreign policies.

¹ Human Development Report 1994, 3.

² Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development 1987; “sustainable development” had been the main issue of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro 1992).

³ Final Report of the Commission on Human Security 2003, 2.

Behind these definitions and the respective UN programs stand well-defined interests. In particular, some medium powers, such as Canada, Norway or Japan, try to use the human security agenda in order to play a major role in international politics; “human security” is a programmatic and, to a certain extent, even an ideological term. As a positive formula, *human security* corresponds to development policies and relies on – while simultaneously contributing to – the much discussed erosion of the old concept of undivided state sovereignty during the 20th Century.⁴ *Human security* is supposed to overcome state borders for the sake of people’s human rights and the security of their basic livelihoods when failing or failed states do not accomplish the function of protecting their citizens from harm and violence. Correspondingly, in international law the “responsibility to protect” has been developed, fostered once again by Canada and similar states, and first mentioned officially in a final resolution of the UN General Assembly in 2005.⁵ To a certain extent, “human security” is the positive complement to the negatively connoted idea that a hegemonic power or the UN should become a “world police” after the security architecture of the Cold War disappeared.⁶ But its political function does not prevent the term from having analytical implications; “human security” is the latest and apparently most successful term in a longer series of notions which have come up since the Second World War in order to describe changing security regimes: “extended security”, “common security”, “global security”, “co-operative security” or “comprehensive security”. All these new notions of international security try to incorporate political questions which used to be chiefly domestic into the realm of international affairs. Thus, to some observers, they seem to correspond to the erosion or end of the so-called “Westphalian System” of sovereign nation states. Official UN documents such as the above-cited report by the *Commission on Human Security* refer explicitly to an “obsolete Westphalian System”, thus positioning the present development towards *human security* as a development which ushers in a new era *after* classical modernity.⁷ What began with the doctrines of sovereignty by Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes and the classical concepts of civil rights since Hugo Grotius seems to find a swift end in the present day. From this perspective, classical modernity becomes an exceptional period of world history sandwiched between structurally similar premodern and postmodern conditions. Accordingly, the clear-cut divisions of internal and external security policies appear as an exception, historically appropriate only for the 19th and the first two thirds of the 20th century. Therefore, the current questioning of state

⁴ Cf. the select titles Biersteker 1999; Camilleri and Falk 1992; Krasner 1999; Walker 2003; Sassen 1996.

⁵ Verlage 2009.

⁶ A still worthwhile critical analysis for this point is Paris 2001.

⁷ E.g. Final Report of the Commission on Human Security 2003, 2.

boundaries within the concept of human security also challenges our view of history and of the boundaries between epochs.

As far as we can see, historians have only partially addressed this challenge. While transnational history and territoriality have emerged as important topics of historical research⁸ and migration, transnational flows of goods and ideas, as well as the constitution and maintenance of state borders have ranked among the most fashionable topics of historical inquiry,⁹ these studies only rarely deal explicitly with the concept of security. Studies of historical security regimes, on the other hand, still largely focus on the national and military security of nation states. The concept of “human security”, which has so far been neglected by historians, might thus provide the means to connect the new approaches to statehood, citizenship, and borders with security concerns and offer a coherent frame that can also deal with the classical concerns of nation states. In this way, “human security” could overcome the artificial divide between state-centered and transnational history, integrating both into a common framework while connecting them to highly relevant issues in contemporary international politics. This volume assembles initial attempts to assess the utility of “human security” for historical research. Its articles deal with the issue in two ways: 1) they historicize “human security” or corresponding notions of security, security policies and practices through time; 2) they explore the analytical and heuristic value of “human security” for historiography.

1. Historicizing *Human Security*

Looking at the state of research on the history of security, at first glance the topic seems to be ubiquitous and to have belonged to the core of historical research for a long time; if we take a closer look, however, it is not that clear which studies should be included in such a presumably long bibliography. Even though Lucien Febvre called for a history of the “sentiment de sécurité” encompassing religious, economic, political, and social aspects of security production as early as 1956,¹⁰ curiously, that path has not been taken by many historians. In France, in reaction to his demand, on the one hand, a history of the spread of late Medieval and Early Modern maritime insurance business was published¹¹ and, on the other hand, Jean Delumeau’s works on fear, punishment and culpabilization in Early Modern times appeared.¹² Since fear is the mental and emotional counterpart to security, Delumeau focused on the inner subjective reactions to “fear” and how the different confessional cultures in Early

⁸ Geyer and Bright 1995; Maier 2006; Maier 2000; Conze 2004, 15-43; Osterhammel 2001.

⁹ As excellent examples see Ngai 2004; Reinecke 2010.

¹⁰ Febvre 1956.

¹¹ Boiteux 1968.

¹² Delumeau, 1978; Delumeau 1983; Delumeau 1989.

Modern Europe reacted to those fears. The broad research on the discourses and practices of “Policey” put the issue of “security” only very recently in the forefront.¹³ Insurance history remained enclosed for a long time in the narrow methodological and disciplinary frames of law and business.¹⁴ Only in the light of the history of knowledge and sciences did it come back in relation to the history of probability.¹⁵ The fast-growing field of the history of (natural) hazards and resilience seldom focused on the problem of “security regimes” but mostly looked at its objects of study from the other side of the coin, from the perspective of threat and risk.¹⁶ Histories of national security policies still mostly deal with military capabilities and preparedness, while studies on inner security discuss, above all, terrorist threats.¹⁷ Apart from some early efforts to establish “security” as a distinct theme of sociology that also contained short histories of security,¹⁸ it is only recently that some broader collaborative enterprises to write histories of security regimes have re-emerged, but these were discontinued and did not focus on human security.¹⁹ With the exception of one classical but now quite out-dated attempt by Werner Conze, we do not even have thorough research on the history of the word and concept of “security” in a long-term perspective.²⁰ While the most recent conceptual history has been elaborated by Christopher Daase,²¹ for the earlier epochs, e.g. the Medieval era, there are only very vague assumptions that “*securitas*” was not a very frequently used concept compared to the prevailing notions of “peace”²² and “tranquillity”; we have no systematic attempt to describe the functionally equivalent and synonymous notions, or to give a detailed explanation of that absence of “security” apart from the obvious answer that the idea of internal and external security seems to be intrinsically connected to the notion and the practice of Early Modern state-building.

The contribution by Gerrit Jasper Schenk takes up this task, concentrating on the exceptional example of the *securitas* fresco in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, which shows that the security/state liaison had its roots not in the later territorial states and big kingdoms but rather in the late Medieval Italian signories with their tendency to territorialize dominion and governance. The

¹³ Härter et al. 2010; Lüdtké et al. 2008.

¹⁴ Cf. only, as representative for a bulk of studies, Niekerk 1998; La Torre 2000; Koch 1998; Pearson 2004.

¹⁵ Daston 1988; Hald 1990; Hacking 1975.

¹⁶ Bennassar 1996; Favier 2002; Kempe and Rohr 2003; Gisler 2003; Schenk 2007; Favier and Remacle 2007; Favier 2000; Groh et al. 2001; Favier and Granet-Abisset 2005; Mercier-Faivre et al. 2008; Favier 2007.

¹⁷ See for example Leffler 1992; Bluth 2002; Weinbauer 2004.

¹⁸ Kaufmann 1973.

¹⁹ Gerwen and van Leeuwen 2000.

²⁰ Conze 1984.

²¹ See Christopher Daase’s contribution to this volume.

²² For the late Medieval notion of peace in the international field cf. only Kintzinger 2000.

paper by Karl Härter follows chronologically and shows, for the German-speaking lands, how “security” became central to the 17th and 18th centuries’ discourse on *Policey*, that is the discourse on the administration and order of the territorial states. Here, as in the contribution by Rebecca Knapp on technical knowledge as a driving motor of security production, the authors do not stress the present notion of “human security” too much, but rather use a more general notion of “security”. Nevertheless, their papers contribute in important ways to our overall knowledge of the historical production of security. Moreover, this special issue contains a whole section on an important Early Modern security problem: the maritime security of Northern European sailors who were often captured by North African “pirates” during their Mediterranean journeys from the 16th century until 1830 (Ressel, Östlund, Göbel, Müller). The North African Barbaresque cities (Tunis, Tripolis, Algier) never became real states, not even in the Early Modern sense. They remained under Ottoman suzerainty but nevertheless acted quite autonomously on the international scene. In particular, they negotiated many peace treaties with the European states. Capturing European ships and sailors and earning the ransom money was for centuries a main source of income and wealth for the corsair elite of these semi-states. Until 1830, many attempts by European sea powers to destroy the system of piracy by force were unsuccessful, so that insecurity was a continuing problem for the Mediterranean sea trade. Because of its steadiness, the European traders and sea powers adapted to this problem in various ways, inventing and institutionalizing new forms of security production.

The contributions dealing with the contemporary history of security production cover very different thematic aspects of the broad term: threats to urban security by crime and youth violence (Weinhauer), traffic and road security at the conceptual border of safety and security – terms that can be differentiated in English but not in every other language – (Saupe), environmental security in a larger sense, especially with regard to natural and technical catastrophes (Arndt, Lübken, Schulz), and energy security (Graf). They exemplify how, after the Second World War, and especially since the 1970s, discourses on and conceptions of security widened long before the notion of “human security” was coined (Daase). They thereby deliver initial suggestions for a history of “human security” in a narrower sense as an important field of contemporary history and go beyond the hitherto rare attempts at such treatments of “human security”.²³ Moreover, they enrich and nuance the currently expanding field of a political and cultural history of security in a broader sense.²⁴

²³ MacFarlane and Khong 2006, the only monographic attempt to this end, is mainly (143-259) devoted to the period from the 1990s onwards.

²⁴ Conze 2005.

2. Human Security as a Heuristical Device

The second mode of using “human security” in historiography would be as a heuristical device. This procedure implies complex problems which become obvious if we look at the division, intentionally produced by the editors of this special issue, between contributions concerning premodern (mostly Early Modern) and contemporary states of affairs. This juxtaposition of different periods of security regimes reflects the prevailing historical narrative in political science and politics:

In the report by the 2003 UN Commission on Human Security which was quoted above, the preoccupation of UN politics with the new notion of security was framed within a historical narrative of a pre-Westphalian world, a modern Westphalian world of state security, and a (postmodern) 21st-century world of a yet-to-be-achieved reign of “human security”. This rudimentary historical narrative has been expanded by S. Neil MacFarlane and Yuen Foong Khong in their attempt to write a short – and very selective – critical history of the UN human security concept: They claim that in the case of *human security* “we are speaking more of the recovery of very old understandings of security rather than the generation of new ideas”.²⁵ In their “archaeology” of the concept they take big steps through the European history of ideas, claiming that *securitas* in the classical and medieval periods “was [rather] an individual matter and was not used in reference to communities or states”.²⁶ While the period of the Cold War “laid down important foundations for the subsequent architecture of human security in the internationalization of human rights norms” and was at the same time “paradoxically” a time of “a further strengthening of norms concerning sovereignty and nonintervention”,²⁷ MacFarlane and Khong interpret the idea of “human security” as a return to the pre-Westphalian system, to premodern conceptions of universal ethical and spiritual principles which do not stop at state borders. Emma Rothschild sees the horizon of re-entry rather differently, arguing that “the new security principles of the end of the twentieth century constitute a rediscovery, of sorts, of [...] late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century politics”, i.e. of late Enlightenment Liberalism from the 1770s to the 1820s.²⁸ Similarly, the German historian Alf Lüdtke considers the increasing surveillance, controlling, and disciplinary activities of state police forces since the 1990s to be a return of the Early Modern universalistic concept of “Policey”.²⁹ One could link that point with the former discussion by stressing that, in fact, the cameralist administrative sciences of *Policey* already

²⁵ MacFarlane and Khong 2006, 19.

²⁶ MacFarlane and Khong 2006, 25, following Rothschild 1995, 61 – but Rothschild only refers to Cicero and Seneca.

²⁷ MacFarlane and Khong 2006, 262-263.

²⁸ Rothschild 1995, 65.

²⁹ Lüdtke 2006.

treated all of the above-mentioned “new” UN categories of threats to human security (crime, violence, tenure insecurity, natural and human-made disasters etc.) on the same categorical level. Thus, in many of the analyses by historically arguing political scientists as well as by historians, we find the idea of a “return to...” or of a structural similarity between premodern and “late” or “postmodern” conceptions of security. This implies that the time of “high modernity” and nation states can no longer function as the finally achieved standard against which aberrations are to be measured but that it appears rather as a comparatively brief historical exception.

A similar and even more comprehensive mode of understanding the present as a “return to...” has been around for quite a while: As early as 1977, Hedley Bull developed the scenario of a “new medievalism”³⁰ in which, unlike during the Westphalian System of states with undivided sovereignty, governmental, sub-, and non-governmental actors as well as hybrid regional-politically integrated systems might coexist.³¹ Until after the end of the Cold War this vision, to which Bull himself, after having developed it extensively, finally did not subscribe, received no positive resonance. Since then, however, there have been attempts in the political sciences – always developed without consulting historians – to further develop the metaphor or analogy of a “new medievalism”.³² There are many other analogous observations on the contemporary political world system which seem to fit in with these metaphorical schemes, such as pre-Bodin and post-Westphalian concepts of sovereignty; old and new asymmetric wars; old and new warlords etc.

Finally, one could add another similar historical narrative which occurs in the studies on the counterpart of “security”: that is, “risk” and “hazard”: When, in 1986, Ulrich Beck wrote *risk society* in the aftermath of the Chernobyl catastrophe, his vision of the historical development of the concept of risk and uncertainty was still quite opaque. However, he postulated that the “risk society” of the present, in which the unintended consequences of industrialization politics rebounded on humankind, was a new epoch, a “second modernity”, which had to struggle with the heritage of the “first modernity”. Under the influence of François Ewald’s *État providence* of the same year (1986), risk sociology’s historical narrative consolidated and converged with that of Anthony Giddens, Barbara Adams and other time sociologists, now consisting of three steps: 1) premodern societies exposed to simple “threats”, handling them as strokes of fate, living within the horizon of a “closed future”; 2) societies of high or

³⁰ No literature exists concerning Bull’s sources. Already in the 1930s, we can read some similar observations under this title: Nulle 1937.

³¹ Bull 1977, 240-271. For some recent literature on “new medievalism” cf. Zwierlein’s contribution in this volume.

³² Some even compare the competing universal powers of Pope and Emperor with today’s competing universalisms of the nation states and the transnational market economy: Friedrichs 2001.

“first” modernity calculating “risks” in the conceptual frame of an open future, “colonizing” the future by planned actions; 3) risk societies or societies of the “second or late modernity”, living in an extended present and forced to deal with the unintended consequences of first modernity’s planning efforts, confronted with new “uncertain uncertainties”.³³ This historical vision – never precisely developed by Beck or Giddens, but deepened by Beck’s longtime colleague and collaborator Wolfgang Bonß³⁴ – coincides with the three-step “archaeology of human security” mentioned above, even though risk sociologists seldom define the “second modernity” as a *return* of “premodernity”. While some sociologists deepen their theories with historical narratives as Bonß does, historians have started to deal with the problem and history of “risks” as well. Outside the field of research on the history of natural and human-made disasters – where current risk sociology is normally cited only cursorily –, a debate among historians about the historicization of the concept of “risk society” has begun only recently.³⁵

Most of the talk of the “return” of a premodern condition is only metaphorical in nature and seldom thoroughly reflected; premodern and post- or late modern phenomena may, at best, look similar in certain respects, but they are certainly not identical. Paradoxically, part of the plausibility of the metaphor may derive from globalization and the dramatic revolutions in technological communications that have changed our ways of perceiving the world and dealing with our contemporaries. Sociologists and philosophers of time such as Helga Nowotny describe this as the immersion into an extended present which they distinguish from modern teleological or historicist conceptions of a linear time leading into a determinable or open future.³⁶ The perception of the world in the mode of such an “extended present”, which replaces the open future of modern times, decreases the plausibility of classical modern categories (progress, perfectibility, nation-states as the “containers” of linear conceptions of growth) while simultaneously suggesting that other concepts (hybridizations, entanglements of “traditions” and (multiple) “modernities”) should take their places. Consequently, the autodescriptive discourse of post- or late modernity finds it plausible to play with mirroring itself in historical patterns that may even be labelled as “medieval”, the period from which modern thinkers were careful to distance themselves.

How should historians react to this predicament? Does such thinking in rhetorical, but sometimes quite systematically developed, analogies produce any

³³ Cf. Beck 1993.

³⁴ Bonß 1995; cf. similarly the historical narrative in Peretti-Watel 2000, 31-62.

³⁵ Cf. Fressoz 2007, who argues, as many do, that “risk society” is not really new but rather that the dialectics between planning, technology and unintended consequences can also be found in the 19th century. This argument can even be widened to yet earlier periods.

³⁶ Rosa 2005; Nowotny 1989, 47-76.

new insights? Or is it just a way of mystifying the obvious, used by sociologists and philosophers while among practical, technological elites the modern categories of time- and self-perception are still in full swing? How big is its explanatory value – does it not create more problems than it solves? How do we deal with the highly contested notion of “modernity”³⁷ which forms, as “pre-”, “post-” and “classical modernity”, the cornerstone of all reflections? This question is further complicated by modernity’s twofold relation to the study of security: On the one hand, we use “modernity” and its derivative concepts as simple temporal notions in order to structure our narratives or to develop arguments about regimes of security in Early Modern or Late Modern history. But, on the other hand, according to many accounts the notion of modernity itself depends on people’s changing relationship towards security. One only has to think of Reinhart Koselleck’s conceptualization of modernity by means of the gap opening up between the “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation”.³⁸ As security – at least in its mental and emotional aspects – is a mode of anticipation, it is located exactly within this gap and is, thus, essential for understanding modernity. Moreover, although not referring to temporal horizons, the differentiation between certain regimes of fear and security is also an important element constituting Zygmunt Bauman’s distinction between a “solid” and a “liquid modernity”.³⁹

If one were to use “human security” seriously as a heuristical device, one would have to start differently and enter the field of structural intertemporal comparative reasoning. It would be necessary to extract the structural dispositions that are associated with the notion today and to try to find similar patterns in history. The most important structural ingredient of “human security” is the shift from a perspective centered on the state to one centered on human beings, and this implies that one would have to focus specifically on all effects of the processes of growth or erosion of statehood, of the forming of individuality etc. Several articles in this volume offer arguments along these lines. While “food security” and the difference between availability and access to food constitute important elements of development policies and of human security today, reacting to capacity problems of states and societies at the threshold between the “first” and the “third” world, they appear to have had “striking” counterparts in the reflections and practices of food storage in public granaries in Early Modern states structurally positioned at the threshold of “modernity” (Collet). The production of human security via insurances also exhibits salient resemblances between Early Modern and contemporary practices that differ from the intermediate period of the “normal secure state” (Zwierlein). Papers on Barbaresque

³⁷ For an instructive and skeptical assessment of its analytic potential see Cooper 2005, 113-152.

³⁸ Koselleck 1995, 349-375.

³⁹ Bauman 2006.

piracy in Early Modern times are inspired by the recurrence of piracy around the Horn of Africa since the late 1990s. While piracy today lies rather at the margins of the human security approach, the best informed current analyses suggest that it is a consequence of unstable living conditions in the societies that host the pirates and, thus, of failed or failing states which are a paradigmatic human security problem.⁴⁰ Intertemporal comparisons have to deal with the problem that Barbaresque city-states were far away from any forms of statehood even in Early Modern terms. Comparing the two phenomena might already suggest that they share enough common features in terms of security production, which, considering the differences, is highly doubtful.

While many political scientists already do not hesitate to conduct such interepochal comparisons without waiting for a prior elaboration of a real method – comparing, for example, Ancient Rome, the Mongolian Empire, the USSR, and the USA as types of empires⁴¹ – many historians are more hesitant, searching for the explanatory value for specific phenomena as well as for a theory and methodology of intertemporal/interepochal comparisons which does not yet exist. Therefore, at the current state of historiographical reflection, we can leave the reader only with the suggestion that there is an important problem to be solved. While a full elaboration of a method of intertemporal comparisons of human security cannot be delivered in this volume, we hope that the juxtaposition of Early Modern and contemporary ways of thinking about and producing (human) security will establish the fruitfulness of this field of study for future research on security regimes and discourses, focusing on “human security” as a more specific and narrower object than merely “security”.

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⁴⁰ Sauvageot 2009.

⁴¹ Münkler 2005.

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