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(IN)SECURITY IN POST-SOVIET EURASIA: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM CRITICAL SECURITY STUDIES

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Abstract: Since the 1990s, (in)security in post-Soviet Eurasia has been conceptualized by International Relations scholars as being mainly connected to the permanence of regional violent conflicts and the challenges of fragile sovereignty. After 9/11, terrorism as a broad category has also been added to the lexicon. These views place state security at the centre of analysis, and focus mainly on military aspects of security. This article addresses the limitations of analyses of post-Soviet Eurasian security shaped by these two trends and puts forwards critical alternatives to analyse insecurity in this region. Building on insights from critical security studies, namely Ken Booth's work and his central concept of emancipation, as well as the nexus between human rights and security – human security –, this paper presents a new framework of analysis for regional (in)security in post-Soviet Eurasia. The main goal is to reflect on the innovative aspects of this approach in terms of understanding increasingly complex (in)security dynamics in this region, and overcome what have been mainly realist and *realpolitik* views of regional security.

Keywords: post-Soviet Eurasia, critical security studies, human security, insecurity, emancipation.

INTRODUCTION

Security in post-Soviet Eurasia has been mainly addressed from the viewpoint of the challenges to sovereignty and territorial integrity of the new independent states of Eurasia, namely those posed by armed conflict. The permanence of secessionist conflicts in the South Caucasus and Moldova has taken up a large part of this literature (Walker, 1998; King, 2001; Cornell, 2002; Coppieters, 1996; Coppieters *et al.*, 2004; Lynch, 2004; Welt, 2004; Popescu, 2011; Caspersen, 2011), combining narratives on conflict origins and dynamics, with conceptual and theoretical reflections on the challenges to sovereignty, autonomy and minority issues, as well as, more recently, a

focus on the role of external actors in post-Soviet Eurasian conflicts. Although these analyses have made innovative advances on the literature dealing with conflicts in this region, as well as on the conceptualisation of sovereignty, the focus on armed conflicts has privileged a military and state-centric notion of security, making other referent objects of security and other threats largely invisible.

The argument of this article is that a broader scope of analysis of regional security is better suited to identify recurrent patterns of instability and increasingly complex forms of insecurity with important destabilizing effects for post-Soviet societies. These factors are closely connected to the permanence of protracted violent conflicts in the region, both as a cause and consequence, in a mutually reinforcing logic, but they go beyond them. Political and economic inequality was and remains a fundamental reason for the emergence and maintenance of the ‘frozen’ conflicts; and because of their permanence, inequality and diverse forms of structural violence are maintained in these societies. Thus, rather than trying to establish a path of causality, between root causes of conflicts and their consequences, this article provides a critique of the negative impacts of making certain dimensions of violence invisible both in academic analysis and policy-making. Moreover, insecurity in the region is also dependent on non-state threats such as organised crime (drug trade, smuggling of weapons and people), food and energy scarcity, etc. requiring broader approaches to the study of security, which place human beings rather than state institutions as the ultimate referents of security.

In order to make this critique and to overcome this narrow perspective on security, we build on insights from critical security studies literature, including Ken Booth’s work and conceptualisations of security and emancipation, which are in many ways reminiscent of Galtung’s Peace Research tradition (Buzan and Hansen, 2009: 206). The article engages also with the human rights-security nexus, namely the human security literature. This approach shares the critical security studies’ perspectives on the limitations of state-centric views of security and the need to focus on the individual (and their sub- and trans-state communities) as the main referent of security. It further raises a debate on state sovereignty and the responsibilities of states in protecting individuals and providing them with emancipator conditions.

A critical approach to the challenges of security in Eurasia would thus seek to understand the totality of society, and how it comes about in a specific context (Horkheimer, 1972). A historical overview of the development of patterns of violence and insecurity in and across these societies will expose the recurrent nature of insecurity at the individual and societal level. After the end of the communist system, this is particularly visible at the economic level, although political insecurity, including

through cultural violence, was already present during the communist period. The transition to liberal democracy, unachieved as it was, furthered insecurities, both at the level of the individual and of the communities, including at state level. An integrated approach, which brings together these processes and dynamics under a framework of analysis of regional insecurity, is better placed to map the challenges ahead and put forward more balanced policy options.

With these goals in mind, the article begins with a literature review on the development of security studies and analysis of (in)security in post-Soviet Eurasia, identifying the main strands and approaches and assessing the limits of orthodox realist conceptual and analytical frameworks, which have been privileged. The second section then looks at the proposals from critical security studies and the human rights-security nexus, including debates on human security. The final section illustrates the possibilities inherent in the application of critical approaches to the study of post-Soviet Eurasian security, departing from the empirical realities on the ground, which constitute forms of insecurity. Due to the limits of space, this section is aimed more at setting an agenda for future empirical research than at presenting fully developed analyses.

EVOLVING APPROACHES TO SECURITY: ACADEMIC DEBATES AND REALITIES IN POST-SOVIET EURASIA

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union provided the international political context needed for the development of new insights on security, beyond the narrow understanding of national security and military threats. The trend to look at security in a more critical and interdependent way developed both within the academic and policy-oriented circles. In the 1980s, Barry Buzan's work on security established the concept as a contested one, which needed to be analysed beyond the constrictions of sovereignty (Buzan, 1983; 1984). In his work, Buzan departed from the "tension between the state as the protector of 'its' citizens' security and the state as the threat to its own individuals", which is inherent "in the nature of political collectivities" (Buzan and Hansen, 2009: 135-136). We will address this tension further below, as one of the central dilemmas in place in post-Soviet Eurasian security.

At the policy-making level, a debate around the concepts of common and comprehensive security also took shape. The Palme Commission's 1982 report *Common Security. A Blueprint for Survival* sponsored the view that the security dilemma of the Cold War had imposed important costs on the development of societies and that a new peace dividend should be channelled for development (Møller, 2000: 4). The impact of this report should be perceived together with the report of the Independent Commission in International Development Issues (Brandt Commission),

North-South: a Program for Survival, which dealt with the issue of underdevelopment and transfer of resources to underdeveloped Southern nations. In 1987, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, furthered reinforced this new understanding of security as a common endeavour, globally affecting individuals in a differentiated way (Nolan, 1994). Although these reports retained a state-centred view of security, they provided powerful tools to overcome territorially-based concepts of security and to devise new approaches focusing on individuals and on the planet as a whole.

As these debates developed, post-Soviet Eurasia was experiencing the emergence of the first secessionist wars, followed by the breakup of the Soviet Union, challenging the maintenance/consolidation of viable nation states in the region. Although after 1991 security studies changed the focus of analysis from the systemic perspective to the regional and intra-state, armed conflicts, super-power rivalry and competition, strategic calculations of power, and policies of containment maintained their appeal in post-Soviet Eurasia for academics and policy-makers involved in the region. US policies of engagement with post-Soviet states were fundamentally focused on reinforcing state sovereignty and off-setting Russian pressure, namely through military cooperation and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Russia also sought to re-institutionalise its relations with the former-Soviet countries developing a new set of regional organisations in order to maintain a leading position in its near abroad.

The study of these phenomena remained centred on the realist paradigm, looking at states as the main actors of these processes and perceiving regional and international organisations from a utilitarian perspective, devoid of normative clout over their members (Kembayev, 2010; Triantaphyllou, 2010). Moreover, after the arrival of President Putin to the Kremlin, a fury of analyses focusing on the resurgence of Russia as a great-power furthered a view of security based on power and regional competition (i.e. Kanet, 2005). This trend was further reinforced by the Global War on Terror and the focus on military and strategic notions of state-security. More recently, security concerns in post-Soviet Eurasia have been linked to spill-over effects from the Afghan war (Reeves, 2014; Ziegler, 2013) and the wars in the Middle East (Cordesman *et al.*, 2013), on the one hand, and to the geopolitical competition between Russia and the European Union (EU) and NATO (Averre, 2009; DeBardeleben, 2008), on the other. Although constructivism has increasingly made its way to the mainstream of security and foreign policy analysis in some of these cases, the remilitarisation efforts in post-Soviet Eurasia and the permanence of war have provided room for the lingering centrality of strategic studies.

Attempts to widen the concept and the practice of security beyond the realist paradigm, which dominated the Cold War maintained, for the most part, that insecurity derived from the undermining of state structures. Intra-state armed violence was perceived as the most significant threat to state security, focusing on the emergence of new actors of insecurity challenging the state from within (Kaldor, 2012). At the global international level, terrorism and state failure became relevant concepts illustrating the centrality of the state as the most fundamental structure to international peace and security, by performing the functions assigned to sovereignty. In post-Soviet Eurasia, the secessionist conflicts in the South Caucasus and Moldova, as well as the Chechen wars of the late 1990s/early 2000s justified this view that armed violence, pursued by non-state or sub-state actors remained a central threat to peace and stability in the region (see Coppieters, 1996; Cornell, 2002). These dimensions have concurred in post-Soviet Eurasian security analyses, since the reshuffling and restructuring of sovereignty have been perceived as fundamental challenges to post-Soviet states, in contexts of transition from authoritarian regimes and of secessionist conflicts (see Ziegler, 2012; Cornell and Starr, 2006, Lynch, 2004, Oskanian, 2013).

Individual security, as conceptualized by Buzan, thus rested on a dilemma. Although individuals could be conceptualised as referent objects of security, this had to be assessed through the prism of state and national security. Looking to overcome this limited view, human security became the operational concept, through which the relationship between development, security, and human rights evolved (UNDP, 1994), underlining that state security could only be realised if individuals were also secured from physical and emotional harm. This view posited sovereignty as conferring responsibilities upon states and required a move from negative peace (the absence of armed violence) to positive peace (the conditions for the fulfilment of human potential) – what the UN Secretary General called “freedom from want”, “freedom from fear” and “freedom to live in dignity” (UNSG, 2005).

These changes to the understanding of security posed several challenges and dangers to the newly independent states of post-Soviet Eurasia, because they were perceived by their elites as opening the possibility of external intervention and because they shifted the focus from the needs of the state, which remained the central agent in the management of national resources and attraction of external assistance. This can be understood partly due to the challenges faced by the fragile state structures of the region, which were perceived as the main assurance of independence in a context of power asymmetry. Reinforcing state power and the centralisation of power in the hands of a functioning government was crucial to be perceived as a relevant member of the international society of states, but also to assure autonomy *vis-à-vis* Russia and other

regional powers. At the domestic level, the contestation of central authority by secessionist movements, grounded on identity claims such as religion and ethnicity, required, it was understood, a further centralising effort of nation-building. The argument in favour of a state-centred view of security went that without functioning state structures, the provision of human security remained hampered. Thus, post-Soviet states in Eurasia engaged with human security on a rhetorical level, concerned that it could be used as an excuse for external intervention or as a means to undermine their domestic authority.

The spread of the global war on terror, following 9/11, further made individual security a second-order priority. In the context of increased engagement with the European Union (EU) and as the transitions to democracy and market economy began to unfold, issues relating to the quality of governance structures and their ability to respond to the needs of the populations became more visible. Corruption and organised crime have been major obstacles to economic development in post-Soviet Eurasia and a main driver of popular politics, as became clear in the so-called colour revolutions. The securitisation of these sources of domestic instability (Slade, 2012) on the one hand, and the securitisation of the popular revolutions on the other (Horvath, 2011), nevertheless represents a state concern with sub-national and transnational actors undermining its security, rather than a true paradigmatic shift towards the security of individuals and citizens.

The rendering compatible of the strengthening of state structures, with democratic accountability and social-economic well-being in multicultural settings has proved a difficult endeavour in modern politics. In post-Soviet Eurasia, specificities of the post-communist and post-Soviet transition concur to make these challenges particularly hard. Centralised authority was equated with political and economic stability in official narratives; a paternalistic view of society and government was privileged over individual actorness and civic activism. In the context of renewed geopolitical competition between the EU and Russia, the revival of the Soviet identity in Russia and elsewhere in the former USSR is deeply infused with imperial logics of identity, and thus shaping perceptions of threats to security (Gogin, 2012; Brudny, 2013). This has raised concerns regarding Russian foreign policy based on the historical process of reuniting the Soviet space, but it has also been translated into more restrictive economic and social policies throughout Eurasia, raising issues about the impact of these processes on the development of individual and collective civic identities and the ability of individuals and specific communities of emancipating from poverty, authoritarianism and repression.

Another fundamental aspect for the fulfilment of human possibilities in post-Soviet Eurasia is linked to the perceptions and practices of liberal democracy and the expectations of prosperity under capitalism. The first link between democracy and security was made under the democratic peace theory, and sought to link the diffusion of democratic regimes with more cooperative approaches to international relations. Security debates have established the link between economics and security with notions such as “freedom from want” and third generation rights, such as the right to development (Brandão, 2005: 107). In the post-Soviet context, the promise of prosperity under liberalisation proved illusory, both due to the unprincipled action of self-interested individuals and corporations, and the unapologetic logic of open-market competition (Fotaki, 2009; Williams and Round, 2010; Allina-Pisano, 2010). The strong Soviet state was replaced by a weaker version, incapable of dealing with the centripetal forces of ethnic nationalism and corruption. Thus, rethinking security in post-Soviet Eurasia through the prism of the individual is nevertheless still a part of the process of thinking the security of the state, since state structures are perceived locally as fundamental for identity building and for redistribution of wealth (Habibov, 2013). Below we engage with proposals from the critical security studies, namely their major contributions to a broader understanding of security and Ken Booth’s concept of emancipation. We also address the human rights-security nexus, dealing with debates on human security.

CRITICAL SECURITY STUDIES’ PROPOSALS

SECURITY AND EMANCIPATION

According to Karen Fierke (2007: 167-169), critical security scholars have provided four main contributions to security studies. The first is the need to contextualise events and processes in a historical setting, where patterns of power relations are reproduced, constraining choices and actors’ behaviours. This approach focuses on the processes creating insecurity as a method to devise long-term positive transformation of violence. Rather than going for short-term fixes for insecurity, which will potentially reproduce the existing patterns of insecurity, critical scholars have advocated for more encompassing reflections, which contextualise processes and thus differentiate solutions.

For post-Soviet Eurasian security, such an approach would imply an acknowledgement of the communist legacies in these societies. Thus, the lack of successful transitions to democracy, increasingly viewed as a threat to regional relations, under the democratic peace theory, need to be understood not as a lack of interest in democracy by local agents, but rather as a historically-shaped suspicion towards western liberal versions of democracy. It would also ask to what extent current

processes are reproducing these suspicions. Another major obstacle to democratisation has been the legacy of centralised government authority. Such authority is recognised to those who have accumulated material wealth – a liberal capitalist understanding of power – but also to those projecting a sense of national belonging and national pride – a contribution from nationalist views of the state. This creates particularities in the political processes of the region, which need to be incorporated in the policies of regional security, including those directed at the secessionist conflicts. The fragility of state structures in providing security to their citizens is also the result of the shock therapy of the 1990s, resulting in high levels of poverty and inequality.

[...] virtually all of the [European and Central Asian] transition countries experienced a collapse in economic output in the initial years of economic liberalisation [...] Business elites have emerged in most of the countries, and in general it is clear that the growth that has occurred in the ECA transition countries has favoured some sectors of the societies more than others. (Graham, 2006: 15-16)

These processes have posed enormous challenges to these societies and represent one of the most severe forms of insecurity for the poor, marginalising large segments of the societies from the economic (and political) life of the country. We thus understand the benefits of a critical approach to regional security in post-Soviet Eurasia, namely through the historical contextualisation of security challenges and policy-options.

The second contribution is the link between theory and practice (Fierke, 2007: 168), which is reflected through an unwavering commitment to the concept of emancipation. Without the ability to make a serious contribution to policy and decision-making, security studies remain void of meaning and loose themselves in theoretical debates, which bring no significant improvements to people's lives. As a result, critical security studies, especially those authors influenced by Ken Booth's work, have engaged in a critique of the forms and origins of insecurity, but have also developed forms of social emancipation and human progress. Emancipation comes forth in Booth's work as a central process to overcome the gloomy scenario of world insecurity he presents in his research – what he calls the “great reckoning” (Booth, 2007). In his words

‘Security’ means the absence of threats. Emancipation is the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do. War and the threat of war is one of those constraints, together with poverty, poor education, political oppression and so on. Security and emancipation are two sides of the same coin. Emancipation not power or order, produces true security. Emancipation, theoretically, is security. (Booth, 1991: 319)

The concept of emancipation in Booth’s work is in many ways influenced by Galtung’s contributions to peace research. Galtung’s approach inextricably links peace and violence together and focuses our attention on the processes through which violence(s) can be reduced and eradicated. His definition of violence is rather linear: “violence is [...] defined as the cause of difference between the potential and the actual [realizations of human beings]” (Galtung, 1969: 168). Violence is thus the set of actions and structures that hamper the full realization of individuals in their social environments, either directly or indirectly, in a certain material and ideational context. This approach has been followed by Booth in his concept of emancipation, focusing on the realization of human potential and the need for security policies to focus on the reduction of processes and actions which limit this potential.

In this scenario, Booth argues, states and state security cannot be perceived as an end in itself, but rather a means to achieve and assure the security of individuals, of “all mankind”. This also positions critical security scholars along a cosmopolitan tradition, influenced by the English School of International Relations. Although Booth’s concept of emancipation and the role of states in this process has been object of criticism (see for instance Brown, 2010), this approach requires a morally-committed view of life in society, including at the international level.

Thus, moving approaches on Eurasian security from an individualist or nationalist perspective – which became dominant trends in post-communism – towards a view that perceives societies as interdependent not only at the domestic and regional level, but also at the global level is fundamental. National security strategies that focus on the regional context as a source of threats and which perceive multilateralism as a source of weakness create additional barriers to these views and increase the possibilities of further tensions and militarization of regional relations. This in turn further deprives the societies of much-needed resources for health, education and economic development, creating further social instability and human misery. Therefore, reflections on post-Soviet Eurasia need not only a strong commitment to practice; they need also a moral commitment to the human communities they affect.

The third contribution of critical security studies, which Fierke underlines, derives directly from the goal of emancipation, in that critical security theory is committed to changing the status quo, by making the voices and interests of the marginalised populations their central issue of reflection (Fierke, 2007: 168). It is by assuming their point of view, in terms of the sources of insecurity, threat and fear, that critical security studies embrace an enlargement of the concept of security. In that regard, it is the provision of positive peace – rather than the mere absence of violent conflict –, which should be the main goal of states, reproducing security communities of wealthy and just nations at a global level (Booth 1991: 319).

Such an approach provides ample room to address the problems of insecurity of the fringes of the highly unequal societies of post-Soviet Eurasia. Not only are there economic discrepancies, between wealthy elites and largely poor populations; there are also huge differences in terms of access to political representation by ethnic and religious minorities. Women remain marginal contributors to policy-making and economic development, and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) by the secessionist conflicts plaguing the region since the late 1980s, remain marginalised citizens, with fewer economic, political, and social opportunities. Since these conditions result from obvious power discrepancies, critical security studies' commitment to a moral obligation to empowering these marginalised communities and to providing the means to level the playing field is much welcomed.

The fourth contribution is the acknowledgement of the social role of theory (Fierke, 2007: 168). The production of knowledge is part of the process of developing social realities, either through the work of academia, or the work of the media and social activists. These are the people entrusted with creating, channelling, and transmitting assessments of security risks and priorities, as well as with guiding decision-making. Thus, all knowledge is power, as advocated by Michel Foucault (Gordon, 1980), making it a moral and normative imperative to focus security studies on the origins of insecurity and oppression and to prioritise the most important threats to peace and human security, even when these are not structured along established academic cannons.

As argued above, traditional security studies' focus on state security exclusively and uncritically engaging with official discourses about national security goals, often instrumentalised for the sake of personal gain, come across as an immoral stance. Whether the state is a necessary condition for the improvement of human security, or not, it is open for debate. What is clear is that the functions and forms of state development in post-Soviet Eurasia should be assessed vis-à-vis the results achieved in terms of possibilities for emancipation of their communities and their contribution to regional and global security processes. We address briefly below some of the debates

on human security as a means to provide further illustrations of these dynamics and to advocate for the important link between human rights and security.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS-SECURITY NEXUS: HUMAN SECURITY DEBATES

Human rights and security have been two areas uneasily brought together under the concept of human security. Are there advantages in looking at the fulfilment of human rights as a form of security provision? How can critical security studies and their central concept of emancipation engage with human rights debates? Finally, what benefits would these approaches bring to study and practice of post-Soviet Eurasian security? Critical views of human rights begin by questioning common assumptions and adopt a stance committed to change, placing at the centre the voices of the marginalised and victimised (Dunne and Wheeler, 2004: 9). The discourses of human rights and security have become inextricably intertwined under these critical lenses, since security, as we have argued above is no longer strictly conceived as being the security of states, but rather has evolved to place at its core the security of individuals. The security of individuals, from a perspective of emancipation, is thus perceived as being dependent on the realisation of human potential in specific historical contexts.

However, the relativisation of rights, imposed by restrictive concepts of national citizenship, needs to be understood in the light of the universal character of the rights one seeks to make culturally, economically or socially relative. This cosmopolitan view of rights understands individuals as being part of humanity, first and foremost. This understanding is at the basis of third generation rights, the so-called 'solidarity rights', including the right to development, to peace or to environmental sustainability – aspects clearly present in the development-based human security agenda. Criticism of the universalist approach to human rights has focused both on domestic and global dynamics, underlining how differences of power explained and justified the imposition of certain narratives about right and wrong (Wieviorka, 2013: 1947). Under the guise of national security, rights can be constrained by the elites who develop and promote mainstream narratives. Likewise, under the fear of insecurity, global interventions are legitimised in the name of democracy, human rights, and humanitarian concerns with human security violations. What these cases make invisible – but critical approaches to human rights and security shed light on – is the sectorial view and practice of human rights protection: in the name of the security of few, the insecurity of many is permitted, or even worse, it is provoked and reproduced. This exposes a fundamental contradiction between the universalism of the mainstream narratives of rights and security, and the restrictive practices it develops.

Those whose rights are neither protected nor promoted experience several forms of insecurity. If their right to security can be derived from their universal condition of being human, the operationalisation of this project needs to be socially bound and culturally mediated. The so-called fourth generation rights – collective rights – illustrate how certain groups of individuals require additional protection, due to their “relative position [...] in relation to power and resources” (Lykes, 2001: 160). This view assesses rights of individuals from the perspective of the social and political structures in which they are embedded and thus provides a way for relativism which does not impair on the universality of rights.

The construction of fairer and less violent social, economic and political structures is particularly relevant in post-conflict scenarios. Not only because there is an opportunity to redesign power relations, but also because of the danger that processes of violence developed throughout the conflict will linger in the new order. Moreover, high levels of violence and trauma might be seen as acceptable after extended periods of violent conflict. An interactive and socially-constructed, time- and place-contingent interpretation of these forms of lingering violences is crucial to empower those experiencing it. These processes impact not only the individuals exposed to violence, but also the communities they are part of and linger across generations, challenging understandings of the past and the future and how these groups can work towards cultural affirmation (*ibidem*: 162).

Many of these reflections on the nexus between human rights and security have been encapsulated in the concept of human security. This concept remains a contested one, both in its academic validity and in its added-value for policy-making (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy, 2007). Although we will not enter into these discussions here, the concept of human security has been linked to three main themes (Fierke, 2007: 146), of relevance to international security. The first relates to the international legal view, seeking to protect human rights through the sanctioning of governmental actions, namely through the resource to international tribunals (e.g. the International Criminal Court) and sanctions. The second focuses on humanitarian assistance in conflict scenarios, in order to assure basic human rights, including of refugees and non-combatants. The third approach focuses on sustainable development and on the assurance of socio-economic and third generation rights, by promoting policies of poverty alleviation, redistribution of wealth, and participatory governance (Fierke, 2007: 146).

Post-Soviet Eurasia’s security has benefited only marginally from this human-rights-security nexus. In this article, we would like to argue that the major obstacle to this revolution in thinking of regional security has been posed by local elites in power,

which regard the state as their protector and guarantor. Thus, sticking to a realist view, which places national security as the only relevant referent object, is in fact a way of assuring the security of their minority. The diversion of resources for military equipment, rather than social and economic development or the maintenance of protracted conflicts are two examples of how elites present themselves as advancing national security interests, when in fact this results in forms of social oppression. But local elites' perspectives do not develop and are not maintained in a vacuum. The international security discourse uncritically centred on the dangers of armed violence (but failing to assess its origins and to prevent new forms of war and armed conflict) and on the promotion of fear (namely of terrorism and radical Islamism) are two factors actively contributing to these dynamics locally. In such a context, a contestation of these views needs to be developed both locally and globally, in order to have an impact on policy decision-making.

We thus arrive at the central aspect of this reflection, namely the relation between the provision of human security and state security. Authors like Buzan (2004) have argued that, by bypassing the state, human security lacks a clear agent capable of providing security. This point however, has been criticised by Bellamy and McDonald (*apud* Fierke, 2007: 149), pointing out that “if states are often agents of human insecurity rather than security, then the co-optation of human security into a static policy framework risks limiting the emancipator potential of this discourse”. In order for human security to be a critical concept, with emancipator potential, it needs to be guided by a desire to unveil the structural conditions for violence and insecurity, including the power relations sustaining human insecurity. Following the empirical and practical commitment of critical security studies referred to above, a focus on the realities of human communities as a methodology to limit and expand human security as an analytical concept would be more useful, than engaging in endless debates over the difficulties and advantages of an expansive (and elusive) concept.

Departing from these reflections, the next section takes an empirical view of post-Soviet Eurasia and maps potential sources of insecurity, from a critical security perspective.

A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR PEACE AND SECURITY IN EURASIA

Over the last sections we have argued in favour of more critically informed approaches to security, underlining that such approaches would be better positioned to make relevant contributions to security in post-Soviet Eurasia. In the process, we have identified some of the main obstacles to an emancipator approach to security in the region, including the perceptions of local elites of the benefits of placing the security of

the state at the heart of governmental policies, and the coalescence of strong state institutions and lack of civic and social-economic opportunities, in the framework of post-communist transition. These views have been reinforced by mainstream analysis of regional security, much informed by great power rivalry, the privileging of armed violence (or potential risks of it), border controls, surveillance against (potential) domestic threats, etc. As our argument goes, most of these concerns are relevant for the region, but it is their absolute prioritisation, removing human needs and everyday threats to individuals and their communities from the debate, which remains a problem, in our view.

We have thus proposed that critical approaches focusing on an empirically driven assessment of human insecurity complement such concerns. It is our understanding that not only a more balanced use of the limited resources of the region could be achieved, but the conditions for long-term development and stability could be developed. These processes would certainly contribute to improving state security – a central concern of orthodox views – but it would do so as a by-product of a balanced relationship between individuals and state structures, at the domestic, regional and global level. The following paragraphs provide illustrations of this view.

Engaging with the realist security agenda, focused on armed violence and state security, any analysis of post-Soviet Eurasian security needs to address the permanence of armed conflict in the region. Four countries have experienced violent conflicts in the period of transition from the Soviet Union, which remain unresolved (Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia).¹ Despite the status of “frozen”, these conflicts still produce human casualties on a regular basis. This is of particular concern regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, since no monitoring forces have been set on the ground and both Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to support a policy of remilitarisation, nationalistic rhetoric, and the positioning of snipers along the contact line, making this a highly unstable conflict. Political elites from all the sides, including the mediators from the Minsk Group (France, Russia, and the US) rhetorically support a peaceful solution to the conflict and acknowledge the heavy price which the region is paying for the permanence of closed borders and lack of diplomatic relations. Regardless of these costs, no significant incentives have been presented to nudge the parts into a peace settlement. As post-Soviet Eurasia is increasingly positioned as a strategic transport and energy corridor, there are many missed opportunities for all sides involved. There are however benefits for the elites in the continuation of the

¹ Tajikistan experienced a civil war, which ended in 1997 with a peace agreement that included opposing forces in a common government. Ukraine is now experiencing a violent conflict in its eastern regions, with clear Russian interference as well as secessionist and annexation conflict in Crimea.

status quo and thus no long-term solution has been presented and carried through. Mimicry of mediation and diplomatic engagement has been the norm rather than the exception.

It is thus worth enquiring about the reasons why peace continues to be elusive in these countries. Research on the situation of “no-war, no-peace” in these post-Soviet conflicts has hinted at the deliberate limitation of the direct costs of continuing the conflict as a means to assure that societies will accept an illusion of peace (Caspersen, 2011). In many interviews in Armenia, the idea that the war on Karabakh had been won and therefore that this status quo needed to be translated into a political agreement was widespread.² Such views reflect the official military position of the country’s elites and have been central to national identity formation in Armenia, undermining the construction of non-oppositional identities in the South Caucasus. Such process, not only hampers the pursuit of a peace agreement with Azerbaijan; it also creates the seeds for future violence, as new generations are educated into mutually exclusive understandings of peace and security. This link between national identity and conflict is not exclusive to Armenia, naturally, and poses serious challenges in Georgia and Azerbaijan alike.

Another hidden consequence of the “frozen” status of peace in the region, which is directly relevant for human security, is the lingering of destabilising processes related to the high militarisation of societies. Issues like the proliferation of light weapons in Georgia has been one area where human security has been addressed (Wood, 2006). On another perspective, dislocated populations are among the most vulnerable groups, since they linger in a legal vacuum regarding their citizenship rights and experience harsh social and economic conditions. The status of these populations also represents a challenge to state security, because they are disenfranchised groups, without the capability to contest their rights through existing channels of participation. Access to education, jobs, social services, etc. relies on regimes of exception created for them, which contribute to the stigmatisation of these communities in the broader social fabric.

We thus see that despite the fact that these countries are perceived by the international community as not posing immediate challenges to international security, they nevertheless experience, in some segments of their societies, extreme forms of insecurity which undermine regional stability. A commitment to emancipation and the reduction of the sources of human insecurity in the region need to place state resources at the service of human communities. High levels of poverty still subsist in most of these societies, both as a result of the devastation of war, of mismanagement

² Author’s interviews with civil society and Armenian government officials between 2006 and 2011. See in particular, Simão (2010).

and corruption, and of the unsuitable economic policies which were implemented after Communism. Poverty is thus a recurrent pattern in these societies, and affects specific segments of the population more than others, including elders and children, IDPs, people with disabilities and rural populations, specially mountainous people (UNDP, 2013; Cornia, 2006). Poverty is no longer a transient but a permanent condition for many of these populations, carrying important consequences for their well-being, their social, economic and political participation. Empowering these populations by providing them with the means to express the sources of their insecurity is a fundamental step in changing the view point of regional security. It is also necessary to enquire about the reasons of this condition, the structures reproducing their poverty and marginalisation and address these processes.

Although it might seem as if elites have no incentives to address these social dilemmas; an assessment of the popular uprisings, which have convulsed post-Soviet Eurasia over the last decade (Georgia 2003; Ukraine 2004, 2013; Azerbaijan 2005; Kyrgyzstan 2005, 2010; Armenia 2009), needs to acknowledge that beyond some level of external mobilisation and assistance, the sources of popular discontent are real and active in these countries. These popular revolutions, either successful or not in removing the governments from power, illustrate that there is genuine discontent with political elites and perceived levels of corruption and mismanagement, which have been used as a social basis for mobilisation. The political responses to these claims however, illustrate the limitations of the existing structures in accommodating more equalitarian systems of wealth redistribution.

Many of these illustrations and other which have not been addressed here comprise an important legacy of insecurity which remains largely unaddressed in regional security studies on post-Soviet Eurasia. The construction of labels of insecure/secure also displays power relations, which cannot be left unaddressed in an ethical and morally-driven security analysis.

CONCLUSION

This reflection departed from the acknowledgement that most security analyses of post-Soviet Eurasia have maintained a realist, strategic focus, centred on state security and military threats. Both at the academic and policy-making level, this trend has led to limited and a-critical views of regional insecurity and negligence with the origins of this condition or with its prevention. Great power competition and national interests have been stated as insurmountable obstacles to sustainable peace, undermining local agency and obscuring other forms of insecurity which ravish the region. Due to the

presence of protracted conflicts and high levels of militarisation, shifting the focus to human security has been a herculean task.

We have contended that contributions from critical security studies, especially Ken Booth's concept of emancipation, and the critical potential of human security could be important steps towards the definition of new research agendas of regional security. The moral commitment to action, the need for historical perspective on the origins and self-reproducing forms of violence and insecurity, the enlargement of the concept of security, bypassing the state in its dominance as the sole referent object, and a commitment to the insecurity of the marginalised populations; all these elements offer an important guide to reinforce the state-building processes ongoing in the post-Soviet context, in a way that does not reproduce old patterns of inequality. Whether we see the state as a useful intermediary or not is open for debate, but by posing the question, these approaches allow the possibility of reconceptualising the state and its role as a (human) security provider.

Beyond the dilemmas imposed by the no-war no-peace situation in many countries of post-Soviet Eurasia, the region faces many other challenges, which have remained marginal concerns of state leaders. By securitising some of these threats (such as poverty and inequality) we run the risk of presenting these processes as threats to the state itself. It is thus necessary that such securitisation, i.e. the adoption of exceptional measures and policies, be guided by the central idea of human security. It is the security of the individuals afflicted by these conditions, and not the perceived security of a minority controlling the resources, which needs to be the optimal result of these measures. This will certainly further expose the lack of usefulness in high militarisation efforts (including of the police), repressive policies, and segregation. An integrated view – a cosmopolitan perspective – of human security is certainly a much needed approach to post-Soviet Eurasia and elsewhere.

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