Human Security and Liberal Peace

Some Rawlsian Considerations

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Abstract. The aim of this article is to contend that, in opposition to Begby's and Burgess' argument, the idea of human security is not able to deal with the potential conflict between individuals' and communities' claims, unless it is properly qualified by political liberalism. We sustain that it can be expected that negotiations, on behalf of different idiosyncrasies, can reach an overlapping consensus that privileges community security over personal security, institutionalizing what, from a liberal viewpoint, are oppressive practices. Then, liberal peacebuilders have to decide on the kind of incomplete overlapping consensus that would be tolerable; yet, in doing so, they have to be careful not to close the door to enable liberalism to thrive in more traditional societies which, after a long process of experimentation with democratic deliberation, may finally span the core of consensus in order to include sensitive matters.

Key words: human security, community security, personal security, liberal peace, Rawls.

May human security be part of a solution to the balance between individual and community claims? Begby and Burgess have given an affirmative answer in their article (published in Vol. 1, No. 1 of this journal), where they address the critiques of liberal peacebuilding. Since, according to these critiques, the basic sense of self of individuals and the value sets that drive the organization of their lives are only possible by means of their membership in larger communities, liberal-driven humanitarian interventions face the challenge of balancing the claims of individuals and communities. Indeed, Begby and Burgess (2009, 96, 99) argue that the idea of human security is capable of addressing such conflicting claims as it turns away from a state-centered notion of security, which tried to justify the one-time Western imposition that drove foreign-led post-war reconstruction, emphasizing the importance of the lives of individual subjects, as well as sub-state communities of subjects.

To do so, Begby and Burgess (2009, 102) argue that, rather than confining itself to offer a solution to the lack of adequate political representation, the dialectic of liberal peacebuilding as it is conveyed by the idea of human security goes further, endeavoring to lay the foundation for a lasting peace. So, their main contention is that the idea of human security is able to provide for a lasting peace as it makes room for the lives of individual subjects and sub-state communities of subjects, providing for the abovementioned balance. Certainly, the idea of human security as it was set forth in the Human Development Report (see UNDP 1994, 24 and Willett 2006) intended to go beyond the limited concept of national security in two ways: a stress on *people's security* as opposed to territorial security and on *sustainable human development* as opposed to security through armaments. For this purpose, this report gathered the threats to human security in seven main categories,

among which stand out–because of their importance for this balance–*personal security* and *community security.*

It is our contention that the idea of human security is not able to deal with the potential conflict between individuals' and communities' claims, unless it is properly qualified by *political liberalism*. Even though Begby and Burgess are on the right track, the idea of human security as it is set forth by them does not manage to settle this conflict because their analysis seems to confine itself to an open-ended, inductive approach to peacebuilding that, though valuable in itself, may have missed the big picture that the deductive approach of Kantian-constructivism provides. We will argue that it can be expected that negotiations, on behalf of different idiosyncrasies, can reach an overlapping consensus that privileges community security over personal security, institutionalizing what, from a liberal viewpoint, are oppressive practices, and that, if this were rejected in the name of a *metaphysical* or *epistemological liberalism*, it might close the door for liberalism to thrive in the long run in more traditional societies.

I. PERSONAL SECURITY VS. COMMUNITY SECURITY

Personal security is defined as security from physical violence, the threats of which take the form of gender-based violence and child abuse, among others; whereas community security may be defined as security from being banished from or having one's membership in a group taken away, which, otherwise, would normally provide for cultural identity, reassuring set of values, and practical support (see UNDP 1994, 30-32). This report acknowledges that membership in a group sometimes perpetuates oppressive practices, which collide with personal or other types of security, as, for example, female circumcision or genital mutilation practiced in some African traditional communities (see UNDP 1994, 31). Begby and Burgess contend that human security can offer a solution to the balance of individuals' and communities' claims, as follows:

> But to assert that the liberal approach is incapable – or any less capable than a competing approach – of allowing us to address such conflicting claims in any particular case is unfounded. Indeed, here is where critics neglect that the development of the concept of human security may be part of a solution, rather than just more of the same. For while the concept of human security is certainly rooted in a conception of individual rights and their political priority, it is not insensitive to competing claims as well. Human security beckons us to study the needs of concrete individuals in the concrete settings of their lives. In areas marked by prolonged and bitter conflict, certain material needs will quite naturally take precedence: freedom from persecution and the threat of violence; freedom from poverty, hunger, and sickness. But as human security marks a distinct broadening of the liberal agenda, it is simply wrong to assert that it cannot also accommodate the idea that the needs of human individuals to be part of larger communities is among their basic needs, inasmuch as it is through membership in such communities that individuals derive their basic sense of self and the value-sets around which they organize their lives. (2009, 99)

The solution of Begby and Burgess (2009, 97) relies on a "…more clear-eyed appreciation … of those more intangible but no less important needs that have more recently

been added under the heading of human security" or rephrasing the critics of liberal peacebuilding, ". . . what is required is more knowledge and greater sensitivity cultivated for any single case" (Begby and Burgess 2009, 100). In our view, this may not be enough to provide a solution to the problem of the collision of personal and community security. Does community security have priority over personal security no matter how oppressive the former might be considered for a liberal eye? Or, on the contrary, does personal security have priority over community security no matter how domineering the former might appear for a non-liberal eye? Hence, do liberal peacebuilding operations have to ban or allow practices that collide with personal security or vice versa?

We think that Begby and Burgess are on the right track indeed. However, we would like to articulate a concern about what may be a lack of persuasiveness in their argument running the risk of missing its target, which is to rebut critics. To our mind, in looking for the foundations of a lasting peace, they have somewhat neglected what is precisely the cornerstone of a liberal approach, i.e., *adequate political representation*, which in their article appears as a secondary goal being preceded by a sort of political institutions that are not clearly defined. In their argument, elements appear back to front in the following terms:

> In many of the cases that today prompt us to consider the humanitarian intervention, one must be open for the possibility, even the necessity, of a prolonged presence if one is to intervene at all. And here, of course, is where the dialectic of liberal peacebuilding finds its place, and not merely in response to, say, lack of adequate political representation. What one hopes to achieve by such peacebuilding is to erect the foundations of political institutions that could make for a lasting peace. (Begby and Burgess 2009, 102)

A compelling case for liberal peacebuilding should start by showing to its critics that no degree of community security is feasible anyway, unless it has reached a stable equilibrium among the contending parties, ensuring a normative core compatible with the sole internal jurisdiction of each community, which has to fall outside the overall political regulation. If Begby and Burgess argued that a clear-eyed appreciation of communities' intangible needs on behalf of peacebuilders might help to advise communities in the event of unseen opportunities for agreement, we will not disagree. However, in their argument, the sensitivity that enables one to reveal the communities' intangible needs seems to be devoid of a proper liberal framework because the analysis seems to confine itself to an open-ended inductive approach to peacebuilding that, though valuable in itself, may have missed the big picture that the deductive approach of Kantian-constructivism provides. Hence, it becomes difficult to set forth concrete institutional arrangements that would provide for a lasting peace.

II. LIBERAL PEACEBUILDING AS POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

From a liberal point of view, the only ones who have to have a clear-eyed appreciation of their own intangible needs are the communities themselves as they are the ones who have to engage in negotiations to agree on the institutions that will govern their own

prospects of living. Peacebuilders, guided by liberal motives, have to confine themselves to being guarantors that, as far as possible, negotiations occur on an equal footing and without any major strategic advantages that favor any one interested party. If these advantages take place, any semblance of stability will unravel when the aggrieved negotiating party reaches the belief that there are reasonable complaints against the established order. It is precisely here where the idea of *overlapping consensus* of Rawls (1996) can guide peacebuilders in their aim as it masterly illustrates how different comprehensive doctrines organize themselves to overcome political cleavages, so that more or less diverging interests are satisfied without privileging one over any other.

Then, peace disruption refers us to the lack of adequate political representation that makes it impossible for parties to agree on the overall political regulation of a given set of public matters. In order to reach concrete institutional arrangements that would drive all the concerned parties to embrace peace, we have to start by showing that decisions taken unilaterally and without the consent of the other parties will affect the well-being of the deserter. That is, in the absence of feelings of love or solidarity among the parties in conflict, which otherwise would prompt cooperation, it is imperative to point out in a Nashian fashion the prejudices of unrestricted competition. However, this bargainers' equilibrium depicted by Nash (1950) might not be enough as it implies a *local equilibrium* characteristic of monopolies and oligopolies (see Guerrien 1998, 149 and Morgenstern 1972, 1171), and it almost certainly would imply the exclusion of key parties.

We need a sort of *general equilibrium* concerning all or a substantial share of the parties involved. If negotiations aim to achieve peace on an equal footing and without any advantages favoring any one interested party like the Ralwsian theory prescribes, it is to be expected that the *principle of segmental autonomy* will be fulfilled, enforcing "minority rule over the minority itself in matters that are the minority's exclusive concern" (Lijphart 1979, 500-01) - i.e., negotiators have to endeavor to outline the frontiers of the sole internal jurisdiction of the groups they represent, which will not be subjected to overall political regulation because it had been agreed that anyone's particular beliefs shall not be imposed on the separate segments of the rest of the groups. At the same time, a normative core has to be outlined to fulfill the *grand coalition principle*, which means that, "on all issues of common interest, the decisions are made jointly by the segments' leader" (Lijphart 1979, 500-01) – i.e., the frontiers of a *core of consensus* have to be defined in order to specify public matters that all contending groups are concerned with as a whole.

Critics may be suspicious of the ideal outcome that this theory reaches when, simulating the process of discussion that leads to an agreement, it starts from a perfect original position and veil of ignorance. However, they have to realize that not even the most enduring polyarchies neatly match the ideal and some are so much stuffed with irrationalities[1]

1] Unlike neo-classical economics where rationality is defined by complete information, perfect forecast and choice making according to the highest positions in a scale of subjective preference, in the Rawlsian theory, rationality is given by the lack of key information that prevents strategic advantages for the benefit of actors motivated by comprehensive doctrines, as well as a normal risk aversion.

that they are close to borderline cases[2] – e.g., in the US, these irrationalities have impeded the development of a proper policy to fund primary goods, and the prospects of moving in the right direction are uncertain as the current virulent discussions on the reform of the health care system show. There is another dénouement that may be more appealing to a non-liberal eye. Given the specific kind of irrationalities that may be found in traditional societies due to their own idiosyncrasies, it is possible to anticipate outcomes that, though far from a complete overlapping consensus, reach the stable equilibrium that character-izes a peaceful state of affairs.

Experience shows that this kind of arrangements tend to reach a core of consensus the frontier of which leaves out issues that, in advanced polyarchies, all contending parties tend to be concerned with, being subjected to overall political regulation. For example, in the most long-lived democracy in a developing country, India, a set of personal matters is regulated under the sole concern of the separate segments constituted by the largest ethnical groups, the Hindu (which lawfully includes Sikh, Jaina, and Buddhist religions) on one hand, and the Muslim on the other hand (see Jenkins 2001, Lijphart 1996 and Varshney 1998). Matters like marriage, divorce, succession, inheritance, maintenance, guardianship, adoption, and custody of children are governed by separate laws (see Bilimoria 1998-1999). This has caused Muslim membership to perpetuate what is seen from a liberal viewpoint as oppressive practices, at the expense of personal security nor-mally safeguarded in advanced polyarchies.

Despite institutionalized oppressive practices in India, it has reached a stable equi-librium essential in avoiding warfare. From a liberal viewpoint, this is not the best state of affairs, admittedly, but we cannot still find all the ideal conditions, even in the most endur-ing polyarchies (the list is long but just think about the condition of women in Japan,[3] citi-zens with North African background in France, or the uninsured population in the US). The important thing is that the foundations are laid to peacefully undertake the struggle for the fulfillment of a better balance between individuals' and communities' claims.[4] Moreover, the coexistence of a traditional community with others less traditional whose separate segments are run in a more progressive way may be a far effective mechanism to trigger a process of change within the former. This leads us to find the necessary channels of communication across cleavages.

Since we are not advocating a mere *modus vivendi* among groups or subcultures (see Gray 2000), in our view, liberal peace requires effective channels of communication

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2] Bear in mind that our borderline cases are not those anticipated by consociationalism as we are qualifying this theory from a Rawlsian point of view.

3] The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women recently called public opinion's attention to women in Japan, the world's second-biggest economy, which ranks 54th in terms of gender equality.

4] However, like the research program on consociationalism suggests, to undertake a peaceful struggle the majoritarian institutional arrangement of presidential democracies is an obstacle as it allows the underrepresentation of minorities.

across cleavages (see Lijphart 1968, 23) to progressively cross the *perception thresholds* of the concerned parties with the aim of motivating a reconsideration of their behavior pattern (see Downs 1957, 86), which ultimately will facilitate processes of change and self-determination. In India were created separate law boards in 2005 on the Shia Islamic sect's and Muslim feminists' initiative, as a response to the Sunni Islamic sect-dominated law board that, since 1972, has enforced the Islamic Law Code of Sharia, which only rules on personal matters of Muslims. This act of self-determination, prompted from within the Muslim minority itself, was motivated by what is perceived as discriminatory decisions against Muslim women, among which stands out the case of Shah Bano, a woman who was denied alimony in 1978 (see Benhabib 2002, 91ss. and Bilimoria 1998-1999). It is possible that this act of self-determination would have taken more time to occur if Muslims did not have to live together with the Hindu minority.

Based on the preceding considerations, we can sustain that, as Abizadeh (2002) has put it, liberal peace does not presuppose per se a cultural nation. Some liberals inclined to see liberalism mainly as a metaphysical or epistemological doctrine may be tempted to reject an incomplete overlapping consensus as it might temporally institutionalize oppressive practices currently not tolerated in the most advanced polyarchies. Others may be so used to a familiar core of consensus that might find counterintuitive the outcomes analytically reached when the simulation of negotiations in an original position and behind a veil of ignorance takes place on behalf of different idiosyncrasies, and this may have been the case of John Rawls. This can get political liberalism as such mixed up with the conservative and orthodox models of liberal peace, which are driven by a "one model fits all" methodology intending to replicate an idealized Western democratic peace (see Willett 2006, 2; also Richmond 2007, 5).

Sure enough, peacebuilders have to decide on the kind of incomplete overlapping consensus that would be tolerable; yet, in doing so, they have to be careful not to close the door to enable liberalism to thrive in more traditional societies which, after a long process of experimentation with democratic deliberation, may finally span the core of consensus in order to include sensitive matters. In looking for a solution to the balance between individuals' and communities' claims, human security can be an obstacle, unless it is properly qualified. To do so, it is essential to embrace liberalism as a political rather than as a metaphysical or an epistemological doctrine (see Rawls 1985) for a key move to achieve lasting peace in deeply divided societies is to put traditional communities in a position to make their own viewpoints.

III. CONCLUSION

To offer a solution to the balance of individuals' and communities' claims, the idea of human security has to be qualified by political liberalism, the deductive approach of which is essential as it provides the big picture that an open-ended inductive approach to peacebuilding lacks. Political liberalism properly illustrates how different comprehensive

doctrines organize themselves to overcome cleavages, so that more or less diverging interests are satisfied without privileging one over any other. In their way to a peaceful state of affairs, contending communities have to endeavor to fulfill the principle of segmental autonomy, outlining the frontiers of the sole internal jurisdiction of each group, which will not be subjected to overall political regulation because it had been agreed upon that anyone's particular beliefs will not be imposed on separate segments of the rest of the groups. At the same time, the grand coalition principle has to be fulfilled by means of the definition of the frontiers of a core of consensus, which specifies the public matters that all contending groups are concerned with as a whole.

Peacebuilders have to take care to avoid embracing liberalism as a metaphysical or epistemological doctrine rather than a political one. Otherwise, they may be prompted to reject outcomes that, though securing a stable equilibrium essential to avoid warfare, might turn out to be counterintuitive, as the negotiations on behalf of different idiosyncrasies can reach an overlapping consensus that privileges community security over personal security, institutionalizing what from a liberal viewpoint are oppressive practices. While this is not the best state of affairs, it can pave the way for liberalism to thrive in more traditional societies.

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