



Messengers of Human Security: Malala Yousafzai and Immaculée Ilibagiza

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Abstract: Human security is a people-centered approach that has gained considerable attention on the diplomatic and political agenda. Ensuring and maintaining human security is conditioned by respect for human rights and human dignity. Over time, a series of theoretical and practical contributions in support of human security can be noted. The article aims, after a brief presentation of the concept of human security, to highlight the effort and courage of two messengers of human security from different countries and continents - Malala Yousafzai and Immaculée Ilibagiza.

Keywords: human security; contribution; Malala Yousafzai; Immaculée Ilibagiza

“A child, a teacher, a book and a pen can change the world.”

Malala Yousafzai

*“Hatred can enter the soul of any man
and it can corrode over time the love and compassion we have for one another.”*

Immaculée Ilibagiza

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1. Human Security - Theoretical Aspects

The concept of human security became prominent through the 1994 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme, which defined human security as a universal concern for human life and dignity, and which adopted a comprehensive approach by identifying political, economic, food, health, environmental, personal and community aspects of human security. Formulations of human security that followed the one in the aforementioned document emphasized the need for things important to human life and dignity to be maintained despite sudden or gradual changes in the social and environmental environment. Among the definitions of human security, the one formulated by the International Commission on Human Security stands out: human security is intended *“to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment”* and includes *“human rights, good governance, access to education and healthcare... the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment”* (Matthew, Barnett, McDonald, & O’Brien, 2010, p. 9).

According to Horațiu-Traian Crișan, the concept of human security is closely related to the concepts of human rights and human development, in that these concepts concern human lives and impose minimum standards regarding how individuals and collective identities (such as states) should relate to human lives; from this perspective, human security is placed in a relationship of complementarity with human rights and human development (Răducu & Ștefanachi, 2015, p. 72).

Alexandra Sarcinschi believes that *“although the concept of human security seems to be in itself an unrealizable project, like that of global security, its introduction into the debates about security policies promotes the collective responsibility to intervene and protect, at the expense of offensive defense”* (Sarcinschi, 2008, p. 7); at the same time, she believes that *“if human security is placed in the context of international relations as a political tool, the concept could be applicable to social reality; it coagulates efforts and creates the basis of cooperation for development”* (Sarcinschi, 2008, p. 12).

About this concept, Makino Koji, Director General of JICA Ogata Research Institute mentions that it is a concept of protecting people's livelihood, life and dignity by building society in a way that has resistance to different threats so that

children do not die, diseases do not spread, people do not lose their jobs and violence and conflict do not occur.

After 1994, human security became a frequently debated topic in all environments; the development of the human security approach being driven by the urgency to better respond to people's needs in a world with complex and multidimensional challenges.

Human security policy is a practical policy; decisions on human security are made in the public interest at different levels; in practice, threats to human security come from different levels, so protection policies must be developed and implemented according to the level¹.

Along with the international instruments, the organizations that implement human security policies at the international, regional and local level, civil society has been involved in the development of the concept of human security since the beginning. A large number of non-governmental organizations are active at the international and regional level in the field of human rights (for example: Amnesty International, Anti-Slavery International, Human Rights Watch, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Committee of the Red Cross, The Asia Foundation, African Center for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims, Enough! etc.). In parallel with these, each individual contributes to the development of the concept of human security by contributing to the management and solution of human security problems.

2. Human Security – in Practice: Pakistan and Rwanda

The picture of human security in the world is different; in some states it is bright, in others darker.

Pakistan, a country with a long history, where one of the world's greatest cultures was born - the mysterious Indus Valley Civilization and the first Muslim nation to elect a woman as Prime Minister - Benazir Bhutto (in 1988), and **Rwanda**, called the “Land of a Thousand Hills”, due to the mountainous relief and one of the

¹ *Promotion and implementation of human security policies at various levels*, available online on the website <http://humansecuritycourse.info/module-2-human-security-in-practice/levels-in-hs/>, accessed on the 07.11.2022.

countries with over 50% of women in the Parliament (2017), have known periods in their history when this picture of human security was painted in dark colors.

It took Pakistan over 27 years to create a national security policy that formally recognized the need to pay attention to human security. The recognition of the need to provide human security to citizens through national security policy was hailed as an important development. For the past seven decades, Pakistan has focused primarily on the traditional concept of security, whereby attention was paid to protecting the territory and fighting internal and external threats to the nation-state. To ensure human security, the Pakistani state cannot continue to function as it has in the past.

In this country where socio-economic indicators are still low, an important contribution to the application of the concept of human security in practice was made by a remarkable young woman, through her courage and activity: ***Malala Yousafzai - the girl who amazed the world.***

Pakistan's Swat Valley has long been a paradise and tourist attraction, being called the "Switzerland of Pakistan". Malala Yousafza, the daughter of Ziauddin Yousafzai, a social and educational activist, and of Toor Pekai Yousafzai was born in the city of Mingora, in this valley, on July 12, 1997, and she became an activist in support of the right to education of girls in her country and around the world.

The idyllic image of the birthplaces changed in 2007, when the Taliban took control of this valley and began to impose repressive policies in the name of Islam, especially for women and girls; for example, schools were closed, denying girls the right to education, women were forbidden to go to markets, many schools were bombed, those who stood up against Taliban impositions were subjected to violence.

Malala Yousafza, from the age of 11, had the courage to campaign for girls' right to education and against the extremism of the Taliban in Pakistan, arousing their discontent.

In the speech broadcast by Pakistani TV, the young woman bravely confronts the Taliban who have turned the Swat Valley into hell with the question "How dare the Taliban take away my fundamental right to education?". She writes about the changes in the region since the rise of Taliban influence under the pseudonym "Gul Makai" for the BBC's Urdu website; she publishes the first diary entry for the BBC under the title "I'm afraid" in which she confesses that she fears a war in her

beautiful Swat Valley and describes the nightmares triggered by the fear of going to school. Forced by the war to leave her home, she entered the category of “internally displaced persons” in Pakistan on May 5, 2009.

Her courage was appreciated nationally and internationally: in 2011, she received the Pakistan National Peace Prize from the Pakistani government (later this prize will be called the Malala Prize) and was nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize. This fact attracts the attention of the Taliban; on October 9, 2012, she was shot in the left side of the head by a Taliban; as her health was critical she was transported to a military hospital in Pesh'awar and then to Birmingham, UK, where, after being brought out of a medically induced coma, she underwent multiple surgeries. In March 2013, after weeks of treatment and therapy, Malala was able to return to school in Birmingham.

Her courage was not silenced, young Malala becoming an undeniable symbol for the right to education: “*We must encourage girls to express their voice*”¹.

In 2013: together with her father, she establishes the Malala Fund to promote girls' right to education; addressed the United Nations Assembly to request access to education worldwide; publishes, together with Christina Lamb, the autobiographical book “I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was shot by the Taliban”.

At the age of 18, Malala opened a school in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, near the Syrian border, for Syrian refugees, funded by the Malala Fund (the fund's research and work supports the local, national and international promotion of girls' education); she travels to many countries to meet girls willing to fight against poverty, wars, child marriage.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Malala Fund's digital newsletter, *Assembly*², has provided a forum for girls and young women around the world to share their stories and experiences with education, mental health, discrimination, the effects of climate change and more.

Her efforts did not go unrewarded: as a sign of recognition for her activity, the European Parliament awarded her the prestigious Sakharov Prize in 2013; in 2014, she received the Nobel Peace Prize, together with the Indian activist Kailash Satyarthi, for their common goal of fighting against the suppression of children and

¹ The quote was taken from the Malala Fund website <https://malala.org/>, accessed on 02.11.2022.

² <https://assembly.malala.org/>, accessed on 08.11.2022.

young people and for respecting children's right to education – becoming the youngest Nobel laureate in history; The UN has named July 12 “International Day of Action for Malala Yousafzai (Malala Day)”; in 2015, a documentary entitled “He Named Me Malala” was released by the American director Davis Guggenheim. In 2017 she received honorary Canadian citizenship and became the youngest person to address the House of Commons in Canada. In 2019, the young writer and activist, Hiba Noor Khan published the book “The Extraordinary Life of Malala Yousafzai”.

Completing her studies at the University of Oxford accentuates Malala's courage and desire to support the more than 130 million girls who are out of school; “*I hope you will join my fight for education and equality. Together, we can create a world where all girls can learn and lead*”¹.

Her work in support of human security continues; for example, in October 2022 she visited her native country, severely affected by devastating floods, with the aim of assessing the situation in various affected areas and insisting on the need to improve the quality of education, especially that of girls.

Immaculée Ilibagiza, the girl who demonstrated the power of forgiveness, was born in Rwanda, a small country in the center of Africa, named by the German colonists in 1880 as “*the land of eternal spring*”.

Education was very important in Immaculée Ilibagiza's family; parents, teachers, “*were firmly convinced that the only weapon against poverty and hunger was a good education*”².

For Immaculée Ilibagiza and for many Rwandans, 1994 would become a year of hell; over 100 days, between 7 April and mid-July 1994, between 800,000 and 1 million ethnic Tutsi and moderate Hutu were massacred. The genocide in Rwanda, in which 8,000 people were killed every day, remains in world history as the last genocide of the 20th century.

While a student at the National University of Rwanda studying electronic and mechanical engineering, during the Easter break of 1994, Immaculée's life changed forever. To be protected from rape and murder, from the horrors of genocide, her father urged Immaculée to flee to the home of a local pastor for protection. Here,

¹ 2020 - *I graduated from Oxford University!*, available online on the website <https://malala.org/malalas-story>, accessed on 03.11.2022.

² Immaculée Ilibagiza; Steve Erwin, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

she hid for 91 days, along with seven other women, in a tiny 1.20x1m bathroom while armed killers were on their trail; he miraculously survived by praying unceasingly. The parents and two brothers (Damascene and Vianney) were killed by Hutu soldiers; the third brother (Aimable) survived because he was a student in Senegal.

After the genocide, she had the power to visit the prison where the one who killed her family was in and say “I forgive you”, becoming, for the whole world, a model of forgiveness and love of neighbor.

After the genocide, she immigrated to the United States of America, where she managed to clear her life and began to work for the United Nations Development Program.

In 2006, a short documentary “The Diary of Immaculée” was released, in which the documentarians Oscar Peter LeDonne and Steve Kalafe presented her story.

She did not abandon her native country at all, her activity intensified: in 2007 she established the Charity Fund “The Left to Tell” which helps to support orphans in Rwanda; in the year 2009, she organized a party after the restoration of the parental house that became a museum, attended by Hutu and Tutsi locals, an event that meant a sign of forgiveness; she became an author and motivational speaker about the plague of evil and salvation by faith, about the power of forgiving murderers and thus saving yourself.

Her first book, 'Left to Tell; Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust’, released in March 2006, quickly became a best seller, being translated into 17 languages and selling over 2 million copies. Other books followed with a message of love and forgiveness: “The Rosary: The Prayer That Saved My Life”, “A Visit from Heaven”, “Our Lady of Kibeho: Mary Speaks to the World from the Heart of Africa” etc.

Her effort to support human security has been appreciated internationally; she received honorary doctorate degrees from the University of Notre Dame, Saint John's University, Seton Hall University, Siena College, Walsh University, and The Catholic University of America; she has been honored with numerous humanitarian awards - the Mahatma Gandhi International Reconciliation and Peace Award, American Legacy's Women of Strength&Courage Award and the 2015 Motivational Speaker Master of Influence Award.

Today, Immaculée is considered one of the world's leading speakers on faith, hope and forgiveness, sharing this universal message with world leaders, school children, multinational corporations, churches, and at events and conferences around the world¹.

The power of forgiveness shown by Immaculée Ilibagiza is an example for the whole world and a living proof of the power of prayer and positive thinking: *“the power of love and forgiveness transcends the differences of culture and language (...) without love and forgiveness in our souls, hatred can turn neighbors against each other, one family against another, and destroy our peace”*².

3. Conclusions

The concept of human security has been subject to wide academic debate since its popularization by the Human Development Report of 1994. The human security approach has reoriented the debate on security issues from territorial security to people's security, emphasizing the importance of human rights and dignity.

Contributions to the development of this concept are numerous both in theory and in practice.

Geographically located on different continents, Pakistan, a country in South Asia, and Rwanda, a country in east-central Africa, have many points in common related to human security. One such point is the remarkable contribution made by **Malala Yousafzai and Immaculée Ilibagiza** - two powerful voices urging love, forgiveness and hope, international symbols for the struggle to secure human rights and dignity.

The work carried out by Malala Yousafza and Immaculée Ilibagiza in support of human security has inspired the whole world; *“Malala is the beacon in the darkness for all who aspire to rise above their circumstances; she paved the way for many women to receive an education and speak out about inequality”*; *“Immaculee is the incredibly powerful example of survival and strength; she chose to have love and forgiveness when she could have shown hatred and anger; it makes us want to be more understanding and kind to others”*.

¹ <https://www.immaculee.com/pages/about>, accessed on 10.11.2022.

² *Ibidem*, p.297.

Their work is not over. The two messengers of human security are sources of inspiration for girls and women around the world for forgiveness, healing and hope.

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