



ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Video Transcript

Human-Security Agenda

SERENA O. DANKWA: Over the past 20 years, the idea of "human security" has become increasingly important in policy and public discussions. It signaled a shift away from national security and the hard power of a military-focused approach that dominated US interventions after 9/11. Instead of relying only on force, governments adopted a "soft-and-smart power" strategy. This combines diplomacy and law enforcement with development policies, humanitarian aid, and rescue missions.

Political scientist and anthropologist Paul Amar noted how this "human security agenda" seemed to replace the old logic of launching preemptive wars. Rather than fighting enemies, the focus shifted to promoting the well-being of individuals, in particular women, children, and nuclear families.

However, by labelling individuals or groups as "security threats," whether through the lens of terrorism, migration, or social movements, governments can justify harsh measures that undermine the very freedoms they claim to protect. In his study of Egypt and Brazil, Amar shows how the language of human security is used to legitimise state power and control across the globe. As a result, governments expand security policies and institutions. This includes increased surveillance and policing of protest movements and of racialised populations that are seen as threats.

These human security states often present themselves as champions of human rights and care, focusing on protecting victims and addressing basic needs. But this victim-centered approach can limit the self-determination of those who are being protected.

Both imperial and neo-liberal states claim to safeguard human security, for example, by protecting citizens from terrorism, poverty, or health crises. But in doing so, they socially control, monitor, and police marginalised groups, especially lower-class and racialised communities.

These ways of controlling people show up all over the world, sometimes through force and other times through well-meaning efforts to help victims. Ultimately, they often infringe upon the rights of those who do not comply with normative understandings of family, gender, and sexuality.



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In the end, the concept of human security, while aiming to protect individuals, often strengthens state and militarised power. It enables control over minoritised groups under the guise of safeguarding their well-being.