

(First draft)

## **The Political Impact of Culture on Human Security**

Some explorative observations

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### **1. The Meaning of Culture for Politics**

In recent years, we observe a kind of cultural turn in politics. The focus of political debates and analyses is no longer concentrated on economic interests alone. Questions of collective identity and common (non-material) values have gained more and more attention. The end of the East-West conflict (which had also a cultural and value-related dimension) generated the necessity for individuals in groups and societies to re-define the fabric of their social cohesion and the meaning of their common aspirations with regards to other groups and societies.

These re-definitions generally emphasize two cultural aspects of collective identity – ethnic identity and religious identity.

Experts offer different explanations of the roots and the future importance of ethnic conflicts. But undeniably ethnic conflicts have spread worldwide (Lake, Rothchild 1998). We are also witnessing a global rise of violence with religious motives (Juergensmeyer 2001). Gloomy visions about clashes between civilizations became international bestsellers (Huntington 1996).

Religious norms and cultural traditions determine perceptions and behavioural standards of people. Cultural values seem to intensify conflicts. Religious norms, transferred into the realm of politics, often facilitate the use of violence. That is because they deliver an exceedingly powerful legitimation for this kind of action. Very often, this legitimation is instrumentalized for other purposes.

Strange as it seems, the new meaning of culture for politics is therefore mostly negative. For cultural aspects sharpen political conflicts.

## **2. Current Inter/Transnational Policy**

Globalization is a process which connects the public and private life of more and more people on the globe, irrespective of their location and very often without any delay. Some people regard globalisation mainly as an economic process. Neo-liberal deregulation and the confluence of markets, the world-wide fragmentation of production and the diversification of services have a strong impact on the development of states and their societies. This impact is sometimes stronger than the means of national/regional self-determination.

This does not mean, however, that states and other political actors (non-state actors, non-economic actors) have lost their power to influence the behaviour of individuals and groups.

The main challenge to the actors in current inter/transnational relations is the maintenance/restoration of security. This term is more-dimensional and difficult (or, from another perspective: too easy) to operate with. It is used here in a kind of cascade form: security as the reduction of insecurities of different kinds, mainly physical insecurity (= threats of physical violence), but also what we may call provisionally structural insecurity (= exclusion from human development).

Current inter/transnational policy is therefore mainly centred on the task to provide security or at least to minimize insecurities.

## **3. Inter/Transnational Order and Conflict**

Since the end of the East-West conflict, the international system is in transition. The problem with this process is that we do not know what kind of inter/transnational order will establish itself. The situation remains uncertain. Even the most powerful actors in the international system are not able to build such order according to only their interests and values. The inter/transnational order that will eventually emerge will not be conflict-free. But in order to gain the necessary stability it will need a universally acclaimed legitimation. It will further need efficient methods and instruments for conflict management (probably with a strong emphasis on prevention).

#### 4. Security and Physical Violence

Conflicts escalating into physical violence and war (of whatever kind) characterize the current international system (Kolodziej, Kanet 1996). The salient role of the modern state was and is to channel organized physical violence and legitimise its use in order to provide internal security (police) and peace (armed forces). The modern state was, as we have to concede, hardly ever successful in providing security and peace. Exclusive ideologies like nationalism changed the concept of security and made it a vehicle for the sake of the nation and/or the state. National security became thus a supreme policy goal in the state's (domestic and) foreign policy. During the last decades of the East-West conflict and under the nuclear threat-umbrella national security became less exclusive and changed into a kind of common security.

#### 5. Values and Interests in a Globalizing World

In a globalizing world, it is less and less feasible to operate on the basis of national or regional security. Globalisation itself will eventually deny this possibility. The technological developments both in the civil and the military spheres demand a comprehensive approach to security. Collective actors and individuals alike need a secure environment for the economic and social activities. In many parts of the world this secure environment is systematically disturbed. Physical violence, repression, and the denial of human rights co-exist with comparatively safe security landscapes. This is, however, an uneasy co-existence which will tend to poison the safe havens. Globalization is already de-bordering the demarcation between the peaceful and the problematic sites of the globe. Humanitarian values like human rights are by definition ubiquitous. The interest in any kind of world order is shapeless without a complimentary concept of securing human development.

#### 6. Security and Dignity

Any concept of securing human development is only valuable when it is based on human dignity. To protect and develop human dignity by providing a framework for human development has been and still is one important mission of the state. In many parts of the world, states are either too weak for this task, or they are in the hands of leaders without

interest in the fate of their citizens. This does not imply that human security is necessarily security against the state; but it does imply that it is security for the people which are often threatened by the ruling elites or other actors in their local and regional environment. To foster their dignity is then a task for extra-regional actors (international organizations, non-governmental organizations).

Human security and human dignity are different aspects of the same concept. This is especially visible in the case of physical-plus-psychological damage of people. Examples for this programmatic combination are mass rapes of women in war and the recruitment of child soldiers.

## **7. Sustainability**

Sustainability is not only a term for environmental purposes. It has also a cultural meaning. Many species on the globe are being extinguished. Up to a certain degree, this is part of the natural history of our planet. Above a certain degree, it becomes a dangerous process which damages the future of the human civilization. The same is true with cultural traditions. Some cultures, some languages, some institutionalised ways of communication between a group of people and their creator are always on the brink of fading away. This is somehow balanced by new cultural developments. A massive extinction of diverse cultural traditions would, however, weakens the spiritual stability of the human civilization. Modernity is characterized by centralizing and de-centralizing development, by a dialectic relation between diversity and equality. Globalization does not mean the flattening out of cultural diversities. Instead, cultural diversity has to be fostered. Globally expanded norms and values like human rights have to be combined with local cultures and traditions.

On the cultural level, human security has to go global, but it also has to go local.

## **8. Cultural Encounters of a Third Kind**

Globalization has dramatically increased the number and intensity of encounters of different cultures. This has often increased mutual prejudices, hostilities and hatred. In some cases, it has deepened the asymmetry between the dominant culture and the minority or vanquished culture. In some other cases, it has generated new hybrid cultures which tend to overcome traditional exclusive cultures.

In the future, more and more people with different cultural backgrounds will meet and live together, on a voluntary basis or as a consequence of forced migrations. It is necessary to define a framework (or several frameworks) for such cultural encounters in order to minimize xenophobic reactions. If it is true that currently the intensity of violent conflicts is often sharply increased by cultural factors (see, among other conflicts, the wars in former Yugoslavia), we need to develop a 'common culture of cultural differences'.

## **9. Inter-Cultural Community**

Cultural diversity is not an obstacle for mutual understanding. If misunderstood, it can become such an obstacle. It is therefore of paramount importance to avoid such misunderstanding. This is not a question of good faith or bad faith. Instead, we need a methodology for inter-cultural competence. Long before inter-cultural diversity becomes a conflict or intensifies a conflict people should learn about cultural diversity and learn to accept it. This does not mean that they weaken their links to their own culture. On the contrary, it should be possible to understand one's own culture better by seeing it alongside with other cultures. What some call a cosmopolitan identity is clearly compatible with a strong and authentic allegiance to a distinct culture.

But certain norms and values will have to form the underpinning of these distinct cultures (or civilization, or religion). Most of these norms and values have already been ratified by political bodies, governments, Parliaments. They range from human rights to recently codified international criminal law.

We are now in need of practical suggestions how to implement the common culture of cultural differences.

## **10. Cultural Human Security and the Cultural Sector**

Practical suggestions – up to now, it appears, this is the weak spot of the concept. For inter-cultural competence comprises cognitive and behavioural standards. Past experiments (inter-religious dialogues etc.) are interesting but not really convincing. States and other actors are challenged to invest more intellectual and material resources in cultural human security. Many foreign policy doctrines underline the importance of cultural policy as part of the positioning of the state on the international scene. It is, however, sobering to learn that this acknowledgement remains far too often a lip service.

The cultural sector itself is asked to respond to the challenge. The long list of problems human security has to deal with (Commission on Human Security 2003) can be more successfully tackled when people in the cultural sector with their special talents contribute to focus our minds on these problems. This does not instrumentalize the arts. That would be a wrong way. It could, however, help to raise the level of public awareness for the need to push the agenda of human security.

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