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Knowing Culture, Knowing Peace? Epistemological and/as Political Aspects of the 'Culture of Peace'-Initiative, Concept and Programme

1 Introduction[1]

Within the 20 years from the first draft to the end of the UN-decade today, the concept of a 'culture of peace' has achieved widespread currency within the system of international and non-governmental organisations. Yet, it provoked only little resonance in the academic field.[2] This article is particularly interested in the epistemo-

1 I want to thank Werner Wintersteiner for commenting on an earlier draft of this article, and Helmut Krieger for many hours of discussing my argument and its limitations.

2 A keyword research in the *ISI Web of Knowledge* database (accessed July 23, 2010) provides 1.264 entries for the terms 'culture' and 'war', but only 102 for the combination of 'culture' and 'peace'. Among these, only a few articles deal with the UNESCO concept. If they do so, they are quantitative empirical studies trying to verify or falsify the concept (Basabe et al. 2007; De Rivera 2004; De Rivera et al. 2007a; De Rivera et al. 2007b) that do not elaborate on the concept as such. Others use the term in a different context without further references to the concept (Wolfrum 2000; López et al. 2007), and some articles use the terminology without discussing it in more depth (e. g. Seifert 2007). The only works (written in English) uniquely focusing on the UNESCO concept were written by David Adams (e. g. 1997; 2000), who coordinated and led the research unit and embodies the concept and program like no other scholar does. This is not to say that no scholarly work on the concept and program exists. It is obvious though, that this work does not exist in the normalised and internationally acknowledged form of peer reviewed scholary articles that feed such databases and give way to further research. Scholarly work that has not been published or at least key-worded and abstracted for international databases is very unlikely to enter the academic debates on a global level and remains inside smaller and less accessible discursive communities (e. g. articles not in English [e. g. Drouhaud 1997] and/or in anthologies [e. g. Giesecke 1999], articles in small journals that are not indexed, conference papers, unpublished dissertations, working papers etc.). Similar results can be found in the German speaking world: *Wissenschaft & Frieden*, a journal for peace research, does not offer 'culture' among its key categories. A keyword search offers

logical dimensions of the concept, in its explicit terminology and in its implicit theoretical background. It embeds these reflections into the ongoing transformation of an international (geo)political-order which is anything but peaceful. By discussing some of the concept's and programme's ambivalences, I reflect upon links to the global political context of their beginnings, deployments and prospects. Moreover, I point out some of the inconsistencies and limits of the 'culture of peace'-initiative and show how the explicit and implicit definitions of 'the cultural' have changed throughout the process of the institutionalisation and popularisation both of the initiative and the notion itself. Finally, the developments of the 'culture of peace'-initiative have to be contextualised towards the massive changes and the rearrangements of international politics after 1989 and since 2001. Around these two turning points in international relations, 'the cultural' has experienced an ambivalent renaissance.

The argument is organised along five questions:

- Why has 'the cultural' become so attractive within international relations/IR[3] (understood as both the field of politics and the field of academia)?
- Whose culture and whose peace are we talking about?
- What happened to the concept along the process of its institutionalisation inside the UN system?
- Who is speaking for whom in the politics of a 'culture of peace'?
- Can we know 'peace' once we know 'culture'?

two short papers on the 'culture of peace'-concept (Adams 2007; De Rivera 2009), the latter being an answer to the former. An earlier special issue on the topic takes up the UNESCO-concept (Lammers et al. 1995), but is not followed by further discussions in the journal. Werner Wintersteiner has written numerous articles on the issue, but since they are published in German and in anthologies (e. g. Wintersteiner 2006), these texts do not appear in international databases. The same is true for two books titled "Kultur des Friedens" (Vogt et al. 1997; Bialas et al. 1999), as it certainly is for similar publications in languages other than English.

3 International Relations (IR) in capitals refers to the academic discipline. When I speak of international relations in lower case letters, I mean the practice of politics in a wide definition of the notion on an international level, including academic knowledge production which is closely linked to politics.

The perspective taken to answer them can best be described as situated against the multidisciplinary background of political science, sociology of knowledge, feminist international relations and postcolonial theory.

2 International Relations and the Cultural Turn: Why has 'the Cultural' Become so Attractive?

Even though approaches informed by Postcolonial Studies and other critical traditions have started to challenge the disciplinary fields across which Peace Studies are primarily situated, the epistemological heritage of positivist and realist mainstream International Relations in the second half of the 20th century still dominates the terrain (Richmond 2005). Nevertheless, the academic field of International Relations discovered 'culture' and/or 'civilisation' as new buzzwords, while 'culture of peace' made its way to the UN general assembly. In fact, 'the cultural' unfolded enormous success. Lively and controversially debating (among others) Huntington's (1993 and 1996) theses on a presumed 'clash of civilisations', mainstream discourse appropriated 'the cultural' as a variable and a category, but not in the sense of a complex theoretical debate. It succeeded in integrating it into dominant paradigms, since it appropriated the notion without closer epistemological assessment, or, to be more precise, by integrating only what was compatible with these paradigms. According to Mahmood Mamdani, it was from then on that "no longer the market (capitalism), nor the state (democracy), but culture (modernity)" (Mamdani 2005, p. 18) was said to be "the dividing line between those in favour of a peaceful, civic existence" (ibid.) and those inclined to political violence and terror. In political discourse and international diplomacy, this trend of a culturalisation of the political and of a very selective use of 'the cultural' is even more evident and at the same time more difficult to oppose. It is in this context that the ambivalences of the 'culture of peace'-initiative have to be discussed at the end of the UN decade. Today, it seems to be more appropriate to speak of 'culture/s' than of structure/s and power relations. This move is not without consequences. It flattens the analysis of politically made contradictions and their root causes, and it silences critique of dominant knowledge claims. The trend of culturalisation risks turning the political into the cultural, the cul-

tural into the natural, and the natural into what can only be overruled or at best be managed, but not any more negotiated, challenged or changed. To put it differently, talking about 'the cultural' in the field of international relations/IR does not necessarily mean to integrate cultural theories in all their profound complexity, nor does it necessarily implicate to build upon the anti-hegemonic and critical traditions among them. On the contrary, the shift towards culturalisation can also mean appropriating 'culture' as an attractive new category and thereby turning it into a label rather obfuscating than clarifying one of the central subject-matters of International Relations and Peace Studies: war, violence, and political conflict – and how to deal with it or to overcome it.

The utopia of peace and the desire for it stands at the beginning not only of the specific programme discussed in this volume, but of the UN as a whole. This particular institution of international negotiation and cooperation was established right after World War II, in order to avoid or at least manage international conflicts between nations in the future, and to consolidate the emerging new world order coming into force at that time. Yet, we must not forget that the establishment of the UN system was framed in the logic of the *inter-national*, i. e., the model of the nation state along whose logic the internationalisation of the world order was further institutionalised and legitimised. That said the idea and reality of the modern liberal and capitalist nation state, on which I will get back later, lies at the very heart of the mechanisms and organisational structures of the UN. 'Culture' did not constitute a major frame of reference of academic or political debate until the late 1970s and 1980s. It was only at the decline of this historically specific configuration that 'culture' made its way as an explanatory power across the field of the theories and politics of international relations. One could say that the invention and establishment of the 'culture of peace'-programme started off as a byproduct of the rearrangement of the international order after 1989 (the fall of the 'iron curtain'), for which it was certainly not prepared. Its further development and implementation mirrors another major caesura in the global order during the last 20 years: the era of what we know as a putatively 'global' 'war on terror' (which is in fact a universalised project of particular interests) after the terrorist attacks on US-American soil in 2001. As Gertrud Brücher states, the first

date (1989) stands for the enforcement of a 'Western/Occidental' model of civilisation, based on the major constitutional elements of parliamentary democracy and the market, which appears as an irreversible turning point of capitalist-democratic success, whereas the second date (2001) stands for nothing less than the endangerment of the first (Brücher 2002, p. 7). This is the spectrum in which I locate the 'culture of peace'-initiative, its relative discursive success and its relative political failure.

3 Discourse of Power and Practice of Governmentality: Whose Culture, Whose Peace?

The problem I want to focus on, is that even though the concept of the 'culture of peace' was initially not at all designed to legitimise preemptive wars and other military interventions in the name of democracy, stability and peace, it can be used in this sense today. This is due to a renaissance of culturalised difference in the fields of international relations and domestic policies. It is against this background that Wendy Brown's[4] work on the notion of tolerance comes into play. According to her, as soon as culture starts to replace power relations, the hegemonic is reassured as the universal and the subordinated as the minoritised (Brown 2006, p. 186). Along with a simplified use of 'culture' comes a discourse of power and a practice of governmentality (ibid.) that is no more about rights and claims (fighting for equality), which were among the leading terminology in Peace Studies and in the peace movement in the 1960s and 1970s. From the middle of the 1990s on, a discourse of power and practice of governmentality has gradually been rearranged around 'cultural' difference and tolerance (conceding hierarchically organised coexistence). According to Brown, I therefore argue that we can distinguish between two analytical dimensions of the 'culture of peace'- initiative and its outcome. First, it can be

4 Wendy Brown is professor of Gender and Women's Studies and Political Science at UC Berkeley. It is her book *Regulating Aversion. Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (2006) that inspired me to reflect on the notion of 'culture' in the context the UN-decade and develop the argument presented in this article. For a podcast of the book's argument on tolerance and aversion see Brown's interview with *Philosophy Bites*, URL http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=406092 (accessed July 19, 2010).

understood as a personal and moral ethic that issues from an individual commitment and is compatible with and transferable to the agendas of NGOs and/or individual agents. In this sense, a critical and comprehensive understanding of 'the cultural' (as outlined in the early UN documents) can be translated into projects of peace education and communicated to and embraced by those who subscribe such an understanding of 'the cultural'. Even if the early drafts went beyond this individualised focus and spoke of a societal and political ethic and moral of peace, as opposed to a historically prevalent practice of war, I argue that it is the understanding outlined above that the international community of nation states was willing to agree with, since it largely delegated the responsibility of peace to the individual. The flipside of this understanding is a pedagogisation of a 'culture of peace' that can be easily separated from political power asymmetries on a global scale. Secondly, when separated from one's own responsibility and generously meant to be imposed on the other, 'culture of peace' must be read as a political discourse, regime, or governmentality that potentially involves the risk of producing a particular mode of reorganising global contradictions and of dislocating what has successfully been culturalised before. Both understandings are closely interconnected with the political as well as with the epistemological evolution of the 'culture of peace'-programme. One could argue that the UN initiative on a 'culture of peace' represents the negative to the right of resistance equally laid down in official UN documents and humanitarian law – and that the different notions of 'culture' constitute the dividing line between the hopeful accessibility of the former and the growing illegitimacy of the latter. As one small but remarkable indicator of this dynamics, I discuss how and why the major documents have changed their titles over time in the next section; what this shift stands for, and in what sense I consider it as ambivalent.

4 From Local Pedagogics to Global Politics and Back Again: What was Lost Along the Way?

It all started at the dawn of the Cold War, as a bottom-up initiative in Latin America, in the field of peace education and pedagogy. The experience of dictatorship and the rule of the military made people put their efforts in building up a civil society that

could resist political suppression in the future. Among these efforts were numerous pedagogical projects. It was activists and theorists who experienced and analysed the disastrous effects of military violence and the resistance against it and then made efforts to come up with alternatives on the micro-level of interpersonal relations and intrapersonal change of mentalities. Out of a concrete peace education programme from Peru in the 1980s grew a global political initiative inside UNESCO that finally made it to the top of the UN. Yet, it did not remain unchanged on its way through and across international politics and diplomacy. It was at the very moment of the fall of the 'iron curtain' that the notion of 'culture of peace' took shape and turned into a paradigmatic slogan. The results were the UNESCO-programme "Towards a Culture of Peace", launched in 1994, and the proclamation of an "International Year for the Culture of Peace" for the year 2000. The "International Year 2000" was explicitly named "From a Culture of War towards a Culture of Peace". A year before the attacks of '9/11' and the declaration of 'international terrorism' as the world's greatest scourge, followed by the assumedly 'global war on terror', the International Year (proclaimed in 1997) still bore the reasons for its existence in its title, namely a so-called 'culture of war'. It was exactly this element, though, which gradually vanished from the documents and titles, from the slogans and political formulas, while another rationale arose. A year later, in 1998, the "International Decade for the Promotion of a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World 2001–2010" was declared by the UN General Assembly. Over the first ten years after the breakdown of the bipolar Cold War order, war and violence as structural conditions of the lack of peace were omitted from the official discourse. What came in instead were the notions 'non-violence' and 'the children of the world'. While the 'children of the world' and 'non-violence' were added to the title of the declarations, it was nothing less than the naming and the analysis of what had been coined a 'culture of war' in the first drafts submitted to the UN agencies (Adams 2000, p. 260) that were lost along the way. Within a year of transition from a UNESCO programme (the organisation that is explicitly mandated to work in the field of education) to a UN decade (which is not), the 'culture of war' was almost gone – in the official language of the programme. This assumed detail merits a closer look. How

come that the 'culture of peace' can be officially celebrated and targeted at very concrete audiences (the children of the world, the NGOs, the teachers, the media, etc.) while the 'culture of war' has no more address inside the legitimated and institutionalised system of international relations, but is delegated to non-state actors (as we know from the ongoing discourse on terrorism and security issues)? The reasons for the shift from critique to utopia, from the analysis of war and violence to the promises to the 'children of the world' must not only be searched for in the vague epistemologies of the laden notions of 'culture', 'war' and 'peace'. They also have to be located in the political system of the UN and its procedures in their historical and political context. Adams clearly names the causes for this transition that took place during almost a year of informal discussions at the UN level (ibid.). According to him, the 'culture of war and violence' was literally "deleted from the final version" (Adams 2007). It was the European Union and other dominant countries and regions who threatened to block the passage of the document in the UN General Assembly and finally succeeded in taking out all references to what circumscribed the dimension of a 'culture of war and violence'. They took the position that there was nothing as such, and obviously convinced all other partners and adversaries in the discussion to concentrate on the second part of the concept, the 'culture of peace'. The latter is obviously more attractive and easier to promote in a time period of a general rise of 'the cultural', when it comes to define the Self in power. The most evident proof of this irony is that it was possible to formulate the document at the very same moment as NATO's intervention in Kosovo (Adams 2000, p. 260) began, only to name one example of double moral standards when it comes to appropriating definitions. According to Adams (2009), one delegate from the USA was very clear in articulating his opposition, saying that his country was against the formulation of a 'culture of war' because it would be more difficult to start a war, should it be kept in the text. I suggest that it is this central omission, going hand in hand with the integration of the 'children of the world', that constitutes both the concept's discursive success and its factual failure.

The problem I have with 'the children of the world' (where exactly?) and 'non-violence' (of whom exactly?) might not be evident in the first place. Given the fact that the programme goes

back to peace education, it might even seem very convincing to open the horizon to a future generation and put those into the centre who might be better capable of living what past and present generations have failed to establish: a 'culture of peace'. What is at least peculiar though is the coincidence of the disappearance of the 'culture of war' on the one hand and the appearance of the emergence of the 'children of the world' on the other. This shift illustrates my argument on the necessity to differentiate between peace as a personal and moral ethic that is to be applied to any given societal system, on the one hand, and as a mode of dislocating meaning into another rationale, on the other. I assume that the explicit discursive focus on the 'children of the world' was able to negotiate upcoming differences between national representatives within the UN system, who did not agree with earlier documents including a 'culture of war'. While talking of a global 'culture of war', including nation states and their responsibility for structural and direct physical violence within the international system, the erasing of this formula and its replacement by 'non-violence' and 'the children of the world' definitely had the power to mobilise political discourse while efficiently gilding existing oppositions. It is directed towards the future, even towards prospective political agents, who might not even be born today. Such an approach of thinking and speaking positively while generously passing over existing substantial differences and conflicts may be politically successful in the first place. Yet, it is probably unable to hold in the long run, since it lacks what should come first in any successful programme of conflict resolution (which is hardly the case, though): an analysis of what exactly had led to a conflict, how power and resources are distributed, and who the major agents of potential change are. It is against this background that the slogan of a global 'culture of peace' (relieved from a 'culture of war' while decorated with 'non-violence' and 'children') must have appeared to be most attractive, since it allowed to generously go over existing contradictions on a global scale. It is in this context that peace education was taking the risk of being both overstrained and overrated. In my opinion, it is problematic to shift the responsibility of global pacification – which is not the same as peace – onto pedagogy and peace education, while at the same time continuing the daily exercise of power politics on a global scale. A blurred notion of 'culture' can indeed

sustain and foster this move. As it is mirrored in the change of wording of the 'culture of peace'-documents, much of what power politics are unable and especially unwilling to approach was rolled off to peace education and its imagined target group, the 'children of the world'. Differently spoken, what nation states – who finally are still the main addressees of UN politics – keep on failing to tackle is delegated to the so-called global civil society, to all the NGOs and individuals who will put all their efforts and energies to a most legitimate goal that necessarily remains out of reach under the existing circumstances.

The approach has indeed motivated many people to join the initiative on a grass-root level, as we know from the 75 million signatures of the 'culture of peace'-manifesto and the innumerous initiatives on all continents. Yet, it also kindled hope beyond actuality with respect to the potential effects of the honourable efforts among those who were and still are deeply committed to their 'mission' of bringing peace to the world. According to Hartmut von Hentig, the political programme of 'building peace' (which I consider as a problematic term in its own right) constitutes an excessive demand, something that people are unlikely and probably even unwilling to accomplish (von Hentig 1987, pp. 62–64). In this setting, pedagogy and peace education are ascribed to be able (and often tend to believe they could indeed achieve this goal) to re-invent humanity from scratch. They are expected to invent a new human being who is naturally peaceful, while the structures within this reinvention should happen continue to be most asymmetric and suppressive. They should, von Hentig goes on with his argument, "produce human beings who do not even want to lead war, peaceful and reasonable characters who come to terms with existing circumstances, and who are settle for sublimation, circuses or God's reward" (ibid.).[5] I argue that this underlying idea about the potential and the tasks of peace education is part of the illusion and limits of a too consensual concept of a 'culture of peace' that has substituted the former key terms of equality and justice with more consensual terms like participation and education, the right to fight for one's rights from a position of suppression with the obligation to negotiate them without the proper resources to do so.

5 All translations from German to English were done by the author.

Instead of understanding the world as a complex web of asymmetrically "entangled histories" (Randeria 2002), a view that would clearly point to the dominant nations' responsibilities for violence and interests in keeping up violent power relations, a well known and established logic is still at work. As the former director of the unit for the international year for the culture of peace at the UN headquarter in New York himself puts it at the dusk of the UN-decade in a very critical tone, "the opposition to the concept of a culture of war reflects a refusal to admit that powerful states today – just as they have been from the beginning of recorded history – depend on the culture of war to retain their power" (Adams 2000, p. 260). It seems to me that this problematic is the key to an understanding of why the initiative and all its declarations and documents seem to represent a parallel cosmos in their own right, existing along all the legitimised wars and conflicts the world has experienced since the decade has been taking shape some twenty years ago. The promoters of the programme certainly cannot and must not be held responsible for each and every evil in the world. But the fact that some of the most powerful nations of the UN system, those who tend to loudly and proudly praise the white pigeon's flight when it comes to legitimating military intervention in quasi-naturally 'unpeaceful' areas of the world, deny war and violence on their own sides while confidently continuing to apply violence both, in domestic and in international politics, is more than just a detail. It is a constitutive element of the epistemologies of politics and of the politics of epistemology, and it has been so for the last 500 years, since the beginnings of the expansion of European colonial and imperial power across the globe.

5 Political and Epistemological Eurocentrism: Who is Speaking for Whom?

What Mahmood Mamdani critically terms "culture talk" (2004, p. 17) is nothing less than an explanatory framework that allows to think of modernity and political violence in a specifically eurocentric relation to each other. It says that we have to remember that the pioneer 'culture of peace'-programmes on a national level took place in countries not located in EuroAmerica, but where conflict and strife are 'normally' located or even expected from a eurocentric perspective. El Salvador, Mozambique, Burundi, Nicaragua and

Somalia were the first countries that engaged in concretely implementing the programme. It is certainly comprehensible, legitimate and necessary to start intensive and comprehensive programmes where armed conflict and/or postwar instability are acute and affect people's lives in most immediate ways. Still, such an approach underlines the fact that zones like Europe, Northern America or other members or the 'global West/North' hardly ever are thought of when it comes to defining where peace is not and where it has to be brought to. While it is imagined that "the core increasingly organized itself as a transnational open access order ('the zone of peace')" (Buzan 2010, p. 17), the 'peripheries' are thought of as having "remained in natural state form, unable to avoid deep structural tensions with the open access order" (ibid). It is actually rarely named in which ways the former is accountable for the latter. In such an approach, EuroAmerica still holds the position of the entity being capable, willing and even obliged to 'bring peace', while the politically and epistemologically framed zones of instability, failed or rogue states, etc. are thought of as remaining in what is still understood as some sort of 'natural state' of an 'underdeveloped' society and (non-)order. To illustrate this argument, let me invite you to take a look at the map of the world as it is colourfully presented in the Global Peace Index (2010) by the Institute of Economics and Peace. According to specific indicators that can be traced in the detailed reports on its website, the Australian think tank shows the most 'peaceable' nations of the world in green, the less peaceable ones in red, and others in shades of yellow and orange. At first sight, the map is convincing and most of all reassuring for Europeans. But as with the example of the first nations to implement programmes within the 'culture of peace'-initiative, it is striking that regions like Northern America and Europe are again presented explicitly as those where the privilege of peace is not only 'naturally' located, but implicitly where it is supposed to come from both historically and in the future, as the institute's explicit intention is to provide information on the factors for successful business making around the globe. Yet, the map would look fairly different if the variables for empirical research were different ones. If they were elaborated on the basis of a 'positive' peace (including the elimination of structural violence etc.) and not a 'negative' one (based exclusively on the absence of what is defined as war

etc.), other factors would have come to the forefront and change the self-assuring image of where peace is located. If the production and sale of military weapons, the consumption of energy and the ecological footprint, or the economic profit of crude exploitation of natural and human resources would figure as indicators for (non-)peacefulness, the reds and greens on the map would indeed be organized differently – and the colourful picture would be much more inconvenient for those in charge of global political and epistemological power. The existing map however shows that like tolerance, peace is "generally conferred by those who do not require it on those who do" (Brown 2006, p. 13).

This attitude of how and where to locate peacefulness is deeply rooted in examples of eurocentric and universalist morality and polity claims that have a long tradition of legitimising exploitation on a global scale. These also translate into parts of the 'culture of peace'-initiative, as is illustrated by the conclusion of the final report to the first international forum on the 'culture of peace'. In this document, it is said that "[w]inning peace means a successful commitment to build, on the foundations of democracy, a new culture of tolerance and generosity which is, in a word, a task of love" (Final Report 1994, p. 19). What could be more illustrative of Brown's critique than such a statement, issued by a high-ranking UN official? Who is it on whose shoulders not only the blessings, but also the burdens of such a tolerance, a generosity, and finally, still reverberating the sound of Christian colonialism, of such a love are being put? Do those who suffer from violence and war want to be tolerated, loved and treated with generosity in the first place? Is it not intelligible anymore to speak of recognition, justice and equality after 1989? Or even worse, are generosity, tolerance and love primarily directed to the perpetrators, since they have to be included in such an appeal? And isn't it cynical to state in the same breath that "no human group has ever won a war" (ibid.), knowing quite well which groups of which societies gain enormous material and immaterial profits from warfare and structural violence and all other forms of "organized peacelessness" (Bialas 1999, p. 239)?

During my research, I came across another peculiarity feminist and/or postcolonial perspectives are familiar with. Why are most of the routes of research leading back to only a few authors who seem to embody and personify the entire project? Even though

the most profound critiques and complex ideas can be attributed to the name of David Adams, and even though he has indeed to be both admired and thanked for having put years of his life into this project, one has to be clear in naming the position from where the 'culture of peace' has been spread into global politics. Positions like his are certainly positions of critique and intervention, but they still are positions of privilege, located within the political, economic, and epistemological centres of the world. The concept was in all probability developed by many people who contributed in manifold ways to all the drafts, documents, manifestos, reports, etc. In the end though, for the interested researcher looking for material on the subject, only very few names appear on publications on the matter. We must understand these dynamics not on the level of the personal, the individual, but as the manifestation of a hegemonic organisation of knowledge and power as an indicator of eurocentric epistemologies and politics that have managed to universalise their particularities (Said 1994). Meanwhile, innumerable calls for a culture of peace in various contexts, albeit not necessarily under this label and, more importantly, not articulated from positions of epistemological power, have remained unheard or forgotten throughout history (Boulding 2000).

6 Discipline, Power and the Nation State: Can we Know 'Peace' once we Know 'Culture'?

As Werner Wintersteiner puts it, 'culture' and 'peace' are morally supercharged and supposedly self-explanatory terms. Their very combination is not only fascinating, but also intimidating (2001, p. 15). Moreover, it is often the most simple terms that turn out to be the most difficult to define. Definition, though, constitutes the basis for what can (and what can't) be achieved with a given concept. While the slogan has made its way across and through institutionalised international politics, a substantial academic assessment of the concept remains a desideratum. Why is this the case? What is wrong with an idea that can be appropriated and used by very different political agents in the international community without major obstacles, and at the same time remain so poorly theorised (ibid., p. 13)? And would it finally make a difference if academics spent more time doing so?

As Johan Galtung has shown in his own efforts of turning 'the cultural' into a relevant paradigm for peace studies, it is often applied in a dichotomous way inside the academic field itself. Corresponding with the disciplinary structures of bodies of knowledge, a powerful dichotomy is arranged around the alterity issue on a global epistemological scale that translates into political practices. The result is a binary understanding of 'the cultural' in different contexts. 'Culture' inside the field of the humanities (dealing with fine arts and cultural production) bears a thoroughly distinct notion than 'culture' does in the field of cultural anthropology, where it is coined to describe the distant Other (see Galtung 1996, p. 208). According to Wendy Brown, this comprises two particular purports: first, "the autonomy of the subject from culture – the idea that the subject is prior to culture and free to choose culture" and second, "the idea that politics is above culture and free of culture" (Brown 2006, p. 167). In this understanding, which is only applicable to certain subjects and not at all thought as universal, culture is thought of as something extrinsic, individually achievable for the superior (the enlightened autonomous subject of the modern nation state, claiming deliberative Kantian rationality as a basis for 'eternal peace'). At the same time, a second notion of culture is retained as something intrinsic, collectively natural (ascribing essentialist features to those who are said to be incapable of escaping their violent character/nature). One has to keep in mind that the very term 'culture' only emerged in the 18th century, not coming into use until the middle of the 19th century (Williams 1983, pp. 87, 88). As today, it has been used synonymously with 'civilisation' (ibid.) in the 18th century, and it was conceived in order to make a distinction from a theocentrist world view, promoting the shift from feudal collectivism to liberal autonomy of the individual. From today's perspective, this is particularly interesting, since today the term is often equated with or substituted for religion – explicitly so when it comes to defining the Other, implicitly when it is about ascertaining the Self in power (Brunner 2010, pp. 326 ff.). Moreover, 'culture' has never been thought of as equally accessible for or attributable to everybody. "Rather, 'we' have culture while culture has 'them', or we have culture while they are a culture. Or, we are a democracy, while they are a culture. This asymmetry turns on an imagined opposition between culture and individual moral

autonomy, in which the former vanquishes the latter unless culture is itself subordinated by liberalism" (Brown 2006, p. 151).

Finally, it has to be kept in mind that the rise of the notion of culture took place when the modern nation state assumed shape, during the 18th and 19th centuries, along with the further specification of academic disciplines. It was in this period of ongoing colonial expansion and competition between the rising European powers that both the humanities (to establish bodies of knowledge about the metropolises of the world market) and anthropology (to define bodies of knowledge about the peripheries that were to serve the centres in manifold ways) came into existence. These are the disciplinary fields where 'the cultural' has been located academically for about 200 years, and this is where culture and imperialism have been going hand in hand ever since (Said 1994). As we can see in Galtung's writings mentioned above, this early split of academic disciplines and their relatedness to domestic and international politics is co-constitutive of the different notions of 'culture' that we still have to cope with today. And, to be clear, it is the modern liberal capitalist nation state following the eurocentric model of enlightenment, democracy and progress, at whose service both political and epistemological efforts have been efficiently directed ever since. This nation state is a very specific construction and arrangement of violence and power (Albrecht-Heide 2000). As the basis of international relations and its institutions (among which we also have to count the UN system), this nation state is not only grounded in violence and war, but has also come to hold the ultimate monopoly of the latter. It is the basis of legitimating all the bloody confrontations inside a given territory as well as between nationally defined entities, and in that sense it is a major obstacle for peace, too. The historical entanglements of knowledge and power along the establishment of the nation state and democracy give way to take a closer look on how violence is embedded in the first (nation state), while being camouflaged by the second (democracy). Even though I can't discuss the differences between 'nation' and 'state' here, it is still true and applicable to my argument what Charles Tilly articulated in the 1970s: "War made the state, and the state made war" (1975, p. 42). This is even more appropriate when we translate it onto a contemporary global scale: Legitimised war led by nation states or by international alliances and supranational bodies does make and remake the international or-

der, and the international order makes and remakes the legitimacy of certain forms of war and violence. Those forms which are legitimised by the nation state or its extension into the international are then attributed the potential or even the obligation of exporting 'cultural' achievements and 'civilizatory' achievements like democracy, freedom, etc., whereas other forms (illegitimised, because emanating from a substate level) increasingly tend to be defined as bound to 'cultural' habits and 'civilisational' backwardness. What therefore disappears from view is how the former and the latter are historically, politically, and economically linked to each other, and how deeply asymmetric these links are organised on a global scale.

7 Conclusion

Ever since the 'culture of peace'-initiative has come into being and has changed into a UN programme two major turning points have reshaped the world order. As I argue, the politics and epistemologies of the concept are not untouched by the events of 1989 and 2001, between and around which the 'cultural turn' in international relations/IR has to be situated. It is against this background that the potential vigour and the actual ambivalences of the concept and its institutionalisation have to be assessed at the end of the UN decade. Among these ambivalences I pointed at the culturalisation of the political, the pedagogisation of peace-building, the fading of what was initially named the 'culture of war', and a eurocentrism which is embedded into the epistemologies as well as into the politics of the 'culture of peace'-initiative. This has to do with the selective way 'the cultural' is negotiated in different contexts in international relations. These practices of knowledge formation are deeply enmeshed in global politics and its transformations within a still imperial and capitalist frame. This frame systemically necessitates violence and war to sustain itself, and at the same time it claims to provide the only guarantee for democracy, freedom, and peace. This is what we have to remember when speaking of a 'culture of peace' and/or a 'culture of war' on a global scale.

I want to conclude my considerations by mentioning the notion of "epistemic violence" as understood by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1994). Following scholars of Postcolonial and/or Feminist Studies, she locates the power of academic knowledge production

in the heart of asymmetric global power relations and vice versa. That said, reflection on the epistemologies and/as the politics of Peace Studies and on its translations into the political system of international relations is at the same time reflection about the historical and political context of both. In that sense, a critical assessment of the 'culture of peace'-initiative, documents and programmes can provide us with insights about the cultural turn arriving in international politics, its potentials and limitations. In addition to that, we will be able to name the specific historical and political circumstances under which certain paradigms achieve prominence while others are on decline. Finally, we will have to critically assess whether the official 'culture of peace' in its existing form is still what it was meant to be at the outset. If this is not the case, we have to be clear in naming reasons for that change on the political as well as on the epistemological level. Additionally, we should also ask ourselves whether the "culture talk" (Mamdani 2004, p. 17) on war and peace not only fails to fully analyse and overcome existing traditions of inter- and intrastate violence, but if it even has its potential share in the epistemic violence rooted in eurocentric and universalist traditions of domination that contribute to other forms of violence – politically and epistemologically.

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