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Comparative Analysis of Political Cultures in Present-Day World Politics. The Contribution of the Cognitive-Developmental Approach

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Abstract

Political sciences do not provide an appropriate theory of the human being required to understand different political cultures both in present societies as in that of the past history. The structural-genetic theory program has evidenced that humankind went from preoperational over concrete-operational to formal-operational stages, the latter one coming into being late in history. Even in the most advanced nations of today there was a continuous development of the formal-operational stage during the last generations, causing the establishment of higher stages of political consciousness, honing sensibility for human and liberty rights, and fostering a more civilized conduct both in domestic and international politics. Accordingly, political cultures in current developing and threshold nations manifest patterns of a less elaborated and rougher standard. It is maintained that political sciences must resort to the cognitive-developmental approach to be able to understand political institutions, political behavior, and political consciousness.

Since its beginnings, sociology has paid particular attention to the comparison of pre-modern and modern societies¹. Sociology was born at the very time when modern societies had just seen the light of day. Sociologists and ethnologists contrasted pre-modern and modern societies in their different social, political and economic dimensions. They investigated the causes of the emergence of modern societies. Since this time, the comparison of pre-modern and modern societies has played a special role in comparative social research.

Different theories have been developed to characterize the two types of society and to explain the emergence of modern society. For reasons of simplification, we can roughly distinguish between two types of theory, the materialist or economic type of theory on the one hand and the developmental-psychological or evolutionary type of theory on the other. The materialist or economic type of theory examines the differences between pre-modern and modern societies against the backdrop of purely economic and socio-structural changes. Accordingly, it sees the causes of the emergence of modern industrial society in economic growth, i.e. as the result of capital accumulation and investment, or in purely socio-structural factors such as class struggle or power struggles in political control. It ignores or underestimates cultural and intellectual differences between the two types of society. Furthermore, it implicitly or explicitly holds the view that the human psyche has not actually changed in history. Typical representatives of this type of theory are the representatives of

the materialist view of history, institutionalism and most theorists of economics.

The developmental psychology or evolutionary theory type, on the other hand, sees the differences between pre-modern and modern societies as much more profound and considerably more presuppositional. It claims that the differences also relate to the human psyche. It describes far-reaching differences between people in pre-modern and modern societies. According to this, people in modern societies have developed continuously over the last few centuries, in a sense that can be measured in terms of developmental psychology. Only on this basis can we explain the peculiarities of pre-modern societies, such as the brutal-sadistic criminal law, slavery, despotism, the considerable use of violence within and outside the political association, the belief in wizards and witches, the cult of ancestors and the belief in spirits, human sacrifice and the archaic cultural characteristics in general.

Accordingly, the characteristics of modern society were seen as a reflection of the psychological development of modern people. This psychological development was seen as a link or even the cause of the emergence of modern industrial society, science in the true sense of the word, the Age of Enlightenment, democratic thinking and humanism. This further development of the psyche of modern man was seen as the cause of the abolition of corporal punishment and mutilation, despotism, violence, slavery and superstition. Typical representatives of this type of theory in sociology are Auguste Comte and Norbert Elias, in ethnology Edward Tylor and James Frazer, and in history Karl Lamprecht, Hermann Schneider and Charles Radding.

Over the last hundred years, cross-cultural psychology has indeed demonstrated psychological developmental differences between pre-modern and modern people. Both developmental psychology and psychometric cross-cultural research have shown that people in modern societies have continued to develop over the last hundred years and that they differ accordingly from people in pre-modern societies. In intelligence research, this phenomenon is known as the Flynn effect. In comparative cultural research based on Jean Piaget, the main focus is on the adolescent phase of formal operations, which obviously only emerged as a psychological developmental stage in the minds of populations at a late stage in history. This provides empirical evidence for the developmental psychological theory type.

Between around 1840 and 1970, the developmental psychology theory was very present in the humanities and social sciences, but was then marginalized and even forgotten in some cases. This forgetting and suppression is by no means a consequence of the professional refutation of this theory, but rather of an ideological trend reversal, particularly in the wake of the 1968 generation. The disappearance of pre-modern societies on a global scale, i.e. the modernization of societies around the world, also played a role in this. The crude political, social, moral and cultural characteristics described above have also been on the retreat in the southern hemisphere for generations. Although they have not disappeared, they have been considerably minimized compared to the situation around 1900 or 1950.

The so-called globalization process relates not only to economic and technological issues, but also to social, political and cultural structures. Elaborated behaviors and forms of consciousness, political ideas and notions of humanity, demanding ethical standards and cultural norms are diffusing worldwide. Women's and trade union rights, demands for civil rights and self-determination, for the protection of minorities, etc. are not the privilege of the most advanced countries, but are finding increasing support and implementation worldwide. The globalization process implies the implementation of

industrial modernity on a global scale and thus the disappearance of pre-modern societies. The modernization process also caused the disappearance of the archaic world view and archaic customs, in other words the overcoming of the archaic psyche of pre-modern people. The process of globalization or westernization leads some people to assume that archaic man either never existed or that at least today the process of assimilation is so far advanced that all people in all societies today have at least a similarly advanced level of development.

Those who hold this view of the global similarity of people of contemporary different cultures tend to deny and trivialize the actual evidence of psychological differences that still exist. For despite the success of the globalization and modernization process, different societies continue to operate at different stages of development. The very advanced countries continue to differ not only in economic and technological terms, but also in political and cultural terms from the emerging countries and the latter from the developing countries. Even if the developing countries are more advanced today than they were 50 years ago, they still lag behind the advanced countries, which have also developed socially, politically and culturally in recent generations. Accordingly, the considerable differences in the area of cultural and political action can hardly be explained in any other way than by pointing to the different levels of psychological development of the people who populate these different types of society. Today, however, the social sciences seem to be almost blind to both recognizing and explaining these phenomena due to their strong orientation towards materialistic theory.

In the following, the necessity of applying developmental psychological theory will be demonstrated using the example of the analysis of political action in different contemporary societies. Even today, countries still exhibit considerable differences in terms of political culture, socio-moral quality and humanistic standards of political action, which can only be explained in terms of developmental psychology. Today's most advanced countries cultivate more civilized political cultures than 100 years ago and than today's developing and emerging countries, despite the considerable progress they have also made. This cannot be explained primarily through a combination of institutional analysis and an ahistorical actor theory, but only with reference to the different psychological stages of development of different populations. This will be illustrated below using a few examples.

The Philippines has been subject to Western influences for 500 years. After 400 years of Spanish colonial rule, it became a US protectorate before becoming independent. It is an emerging developing country that has played a full part in the process of modernization and globalization. And yet it has characteristics in culture, religion and politics that have disappeared in the more advanced countries. During his election campaign, Rodrigo Duterte announced the murder of hundreds of thousands of people at practically every event and in every interview if he became president. He announced that he would feed the fish of Manila Bay with the corpses of drug dealers. He bragged publicly that, as mayor of Davao, he regularly visited the city's drug dealer and addict locations on a motorcycle and then shot them himself. Journalists unanimously assumed that it was also these tough slogans and announcements that helped Duterte to win the election. The population wanted a strong man who could sweep the streets with an iron hand and had the relevant experience. A few weeks after taking office, Duterte announced that just as Hitler had killed 3 million Jews, he wanted to eliminate the same number of criminals. Both the police and so-called vigilante groups were then instructed to seek out and murder both drug dealers and addicts in their neighborhoods. Lists of drug addicts were drawn up in each district and handed

over to the police. From summer 2016 to November 2017, more than 13,000 people are said to have been killed just like that, often on the basis of simple suspicions of someone. Both police officers and private killers were paid 300 dollars for each murder, a motivation that can hardly have had a meaningful effect on the effort involved in investigating the crime. Journalists have spoken of the fact that these processes can be equated with outright ethnic cleansing.

A materialist or socio-structural explanation of these events might try to point out first that poor countries with a major drug problem are bound to use more drastic means than rich countries that can afford the luxury of looking the other way. However, the facts prove that the Philippines does not have a bigger drug problem than most other countries. Even the government does not hide the figures from the National Drug Enforcement Agency. According to them, there were only 1.75 million drug users in the country in 2016, or 2.3 percent of Filipinos. According to the UN World Drug Report, even less than 1 percent of the country's population is addicted to drugs. The global average is significantly higher, namely 5% and in the USA even 16%. Consequently, the above-mentioned events cannot be explained by a greater problem pressure that led to the choice of the extreme means mentioned.

An institutionalist approach could claim that Duterte suffers from a disorder and is able to live it out as a quasi-dictator because democracy and the rule of law do not function well in the country. This power politics approach can also be easily refuted by the facts. After all, Duterte announced his actions before his election, at a time when he had no power over the nation. What's more, he was elected because he had announced these murders. According to the opinion research institute SWS, Duterte's approval rating among the population was 75% in March 2017, i.e. during the period of the murders. Only 9% of the population disagreed with his actions. As this approval rating existed even before his election, it cannot be seen as the result of state propaganda and manipulation. There is therefore clearly no contradiction between Rodrigo Duterte's views and those of the majority of the population. Duterte thinks like the majority of the population. His actions follow their expectations.

No matter how you look at it, you cannot explain these events by combining an ahistorical actor model and social structure analysis, neither in terms of institutionalism nor power politics. Furthermore, there is neither a particular problem pressure in the country nor a mental disorder in the mind of the president. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that even a country as advanced as the Philippines today has a political culture with less civilized standards than today's most advanced countries. Humanistic standards and moral values must be more brutally knitted in this country, as Duterte himself literally said (quote): "In the Philippines, it really is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." This remark by Duterte should actually be seen as a whitewash of events. The explanation for this phenomenon can therefore only be formulated in terms of civilization theory and developmental psychology in the sense of Elias, Hallpike and Oesterdiekhoff.

To understand this better, consider the following. Mr. Schröder or Mrs. Merkel regularly drive around train stations and cinema forecourts on a motorcycle for months and shoot people they believe to be dealers or addicts in Wild West style. The two are not put away, but tell the media and at election rallies about their deeds. They are therefore elected chancellor by the electorate and then start the pogroms. Killers in Essen or Hamburg can collect their rewards at police stations and the people believe that everything will soon be better in the country. However, this scenario is unimaginable, it is reminiscent of a fairytale land. It might be physically possible, but not psychologically. These events are not possible

in today's most advanced countries because the attempt to bring them about would meet with the strongest resistance, which is ultimately rooted in the level of psychological development that the most advanced populations have now reached. The impossibility of realizing these events in the advanced countries makes them appear to a certain extent as fabulous, as completely unreal.

However, the ideological programming of both everyday people and social scientists as a consequence of the cultural relativism that has prevailed since around 1970 is such that these events are perceived very differently when they happen in developing countries than when they happen in the most advanced countries. Unconsciously, we know that the story of "Mr. Schröder and Mrs. Merkel in search of human game" can only ever be a fairy tale. But completely unconsciously, such events are trivialized as long as they only happen in long-past history or in developing countries, and are therefore not problematized.

In Liberia, Samuel Doe became president in 1980 after, as sergeant of a troop of 16 soldiers, he quartered his predecessor William Tolbert in his bed. In September 1990, after a 10-year reign of terror, Doe was imprisoned and murdered by Prince Johnson. Johnson had Doe's torture and murder videotaped. The two-hour video film shows the torture and murder of Doe in great detail. You see the bleeding and shot Doe, you hear Johnson's orders to cut off first one and then the other ear, which is then done, you hear the victim's cries of pain and Johnson's orders to continue torturing Doe. Doe is asked to give his bank account. He wants to do so, but is no longer able to. He eventually dies of blood loss. We see the raging and screaming Johnson and his bloodthirsty and torturing soldiers.

Now this incident is not fascinating in itself. The consequences are more curious. The new President Johnson had this video published throughout the country. It was the biggest attraction in the Liberian media market. Over a long period of time, the video was shown non-stop in every restaurant and bar. The film did not jeopardize Johnson's presidency, it did not prevent his coming to power or his subsequent government. The movie did not generate popular hatred, doubts about his ability to govern or loyalty issues. Johnson probably also did not assume that the release of this film would cause him problems in terms of popular approval. Rather the opposite, he believed that communicating the assassination of the president could facilitate and probably legitimize his assumption of power. Perhaps he also wanted to intimidate potential usurpers. In any case, he hoped to gain advantages from the publication. However, it is not only Johnson's actions that are interesting, but also those of the people. After all, they could have refused to show and watch this video anywhere. However, this video became the most sought-after film in the country.

The need to explain this event in terms of civilization theory and developmental psychology is obvious. Just as the events in Liberia are perhaps more archaic than the drug war in the Philippines, the events surrounding Rodrigo Duterte are in turn more archaic than the recent events in Turkey. It is inconceivable that the events surrounding Duterte or the video film in Turkey are psychologically and therefore historically possible. Turkey is a highly developed emerging country that began its industrialization and modernization more than 100 years ago. It has a long tradition of Kemalism, the separation of state and religion, and a long tradition of westernization. The struggle for trade union and women's rights, self-determination and the protection of minorities, democracy and the rule of law can point to a certain rootedness in this country.

Nevertheless, there are many indications that the political culture of this country does not meet the standards of the most developed states. The nation refuses to recognize and take responsibility for the Armenian genocide. In my opinion, the refusal to recognize this as a fact can only be explained by developmental psychology. The country continues to oppress religious and ethnic minorities and is waging a war against part of its own population. In recent years, the country has largely dismantled the rule of law and democracy in favor of an authoritarian state. However, this transformation of the state at the expense of democratic principles was wanted and voted for by at least half of the population. Democratic thinking is therefore not so deeply rooted in the population as to have reached the stage where it could prevent the authoritarian transformation of the state. Rather, the population has consented to its own disenfranchisement. Following the attempted coup in July 2016, more than 100,000 people were removed from their professional positions and many were prosecuted. The government publicly used terms such as "purges" and "hangings". The government began an unfortunate tirade of hatred against Western countries and Western government figures, in the belief that this would satisfy the nationalist feelings of the people. The government representatives used terms that no European politician representing the national level has used in the last 80 years.

These examples could be supplemented by thousands of others, all pointing in the same direction. Despite the process of globalization and harmonization, also with regard to political culture and socio-moral standards, even today different nations still operate at different levels of political and cultural action. These differences are by no means to be explained primarily by characteristics of different social structures and different constraints, but rather by the different levels of psychological development of the populations. This result points to the necessity of applying developmental psychology to the explanation of the history of politics in general and also to the history of politics in the 20th century in particular. It also shows that a better future may be open to humanity than the past has ever offered in terms of opportunities for a humanistic life. For there is no reason to believe that the process of psychological development, socio-moral progress and globalization will stop in the foreseeable future.

Footnotes

¹ The article was a paper presented before the faculty of social sciences of the university of Bremen at the second of february of 2018 entitled: „Vergleichende Analyse politischen Handelns in der modernen Weltgesellschaft.“

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