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Schriftliche Ausarbeitung zu den Texten
"Culture - A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions" - Clyde Kluckhohn
und
"The Clash of Civilizations" - Samuel P. Huntington

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In this essay I will be talking about *Conclusion - A Final Review of the Conceptual Problem* by Clyde Kluckhohn - A description of the cultural phenomena¹ and how it is to be perceived - and Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations, published 1993 in the Foreign Affairs Journal*². The idea is to evaluate the two papers on basis of their content and the contemporary idea of culture. Towards the end of the paper I will also be referring to some other approaches to cultural definition by further theorists.

Kluckhohn's perception of culture is fairly liberal. He defines *customs carried out by individuals, organized bodies (i.e. formal- and informal- institutions, social organization and other cultural configurations)* and *majority emphasis to working out a generalizing idea* as the main factors that shape culture. Culture exists only through and in human individuals and is to be perceived as a system because its variables are interdependent. The malleability of how culture is part of mankind's mundane life leads him concept culture as *an abstract description of trends toward uniformity in the words, acts, and artifacts of human groups*³. These mechanisms are created by individuals as well as groups of different sizes. By his definition, there can be a culture of (e.g.) communication between two people or within a small group as well as culture and community of common values like there is within the European Union nowadays. Within these groups and subgroups, culture is to be perceived as dynamic, which means that its character can be changing continuously. It is based upon interaction within one person's social field and defines all patterns of social interaction, behavior, and building of an identity within his or her society.

Kluckhohn undelines his chain of causation by introducing the idea of "raw human culture"⁴, in which human life undoubtedly has an element to patterning it's surroundings. Human kind uses this technique to understand and filter happenings, social interactions and peoples' behavior by clustering them and thus simplifying every day actions to prevent information-overflow by new impressions. The brain will only "mark" things that an particular individual has defined relevant for his or her life some time before. This leads to the conclusion, that Kluckhohn defines culture as something that is built by a larger group of people having more or less the same ideas and values of how to live even though they all have their individual lives and differ when it comes to a closer look and everyone's life. The cultural consensus is built by *patterns and informal institutions* that define certain behavior (i.e. how to greet, how to eat, how to communicate) within one culture.

Samuel P. Huntington's perspective and idea of cultures is narrower. In his 1993 published paper, *The Clash of Civilizations*, he postulates that his seven major cultures will clash due to religious and cultural differences. Released just after the end of the Cold War, Huntington suggests that his major cultures (e.g. Western, Latin, Orthodox, Eastern, Muslim, Japan, and China) will struggle to live together long-lasting and peacefully due to six

¹ Clyde Kluckhohn, A. L. K., Wayne Untereiner (1952). "Culture - A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions."

² Huntington, S. P. (1993). "The Clash of Civilizaitons " *Foreign Affairs Journal* **72**: 27.

³ Clyde Kluckhohn, A. L. K., Wayne Untereiner (1952). "Culture - A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions.", 359

⁴ Ref. ebd., 366

major differences and reasons for conflict between them. The factor of globalization is a very important factor for him. With globalization, the world becomes a smaller place by which cultural differences become more vivid. Therefore, and because local identities of cultures are less important due to globalization, religion will be the new and most important factor in the definition of cultures. This, as it can be seen today (2013), is a source of conflict. Furthermore, the superior Western identity will provoke cooperation among non-Western countries which will ally to economic, political, and ideological strong-poles that will compete with the western hemisphere. Additionally, Huntington states that these hard-fact-differences between cultures and the factor of historical growth of cultures are not to be neglected. Cultural indicators such as language, behavioral patterns, traditions, and religion which have formed over decades and centuries will not be overthrown in the blink of an eye and thus be of great conflicting potential for intercultural clashes.

By the existing cultural differences, Huntington does not predict a future development of the world's cultures, except that they will clash due to their differences. Much rather, does he say that due to cultural diversity, civilizations and cultures will not be unified in the near future but will have to learn to coexist with one another.⁵

Approaching a cultural definition, Kluckhohn and Huntington differ substantially. While Kluckhohn actually finds his definition of culture, Huntington has a very critical and questioning way of approaching cultural terms and relations.

Kluckhohn's idea of finding the characteristics for cultures does not match with Huntington's reason for writing his paper which is more about asking what cultural differences could lead to in a globalized and interconnected world. The reason of publication and intrinsic motivation of the authors are very different, which can also be drawn back to the date of publication and further circumstances (end of World War II vs. End of Cold War, beginning of global networking vs. Constant connectivity between nations and its' citizens). *The Clash of Civilizations* seems like a rather pessimistically motivated essay on culture. It does not contain any further definition of culture such as Kluckhohn's and doesn't imply "melting pot" theories that would ease the conflict potential between cultures. It does directly reflect the US position of politics at that time without giving any space for secularization. Samuel Huntington's view from the US perspective clarifies when reading his article. It substantially contributed to a new (post-Cold-War) world order with his theory of clashing cultures.

Kluckhohn's and Huntington's approaches to defining culture are individual views on how culture could be defined and which differences of cultures could trigger conflict. Huntington even sees intercultural differences as a main factor for conflicts today. Nevertheless, these two authors give their view on crucial points in cultural comparison. Scientifically, there are more views and more differentiated sources about key points in the definition of cultures as well as various other aspects about cultural comparison.

If you dig a little deeper, you will soon find authors like Minkov and Hofstede, who introduce categorization of various cultural aspects to the debate. On basis of their of *Cultural Dimensions*, cultures can be compared with dimensions such as *Power Distance Index - PDI, Individualism vs. Collectivism IDV, or Long-Term Orientation - LTO*. By placing the figures from different countries side by side, a comparison of those figures enables an idea of how people could behave in a group dynamically, towards hierarchies or career-oriented.

Another input is Oswald Spengler's theory *The Downfall of the Occident* (orig. Dt.: *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*⁶) which focuses on historically-based traditions and structures of cultures and states that every high

⁵ Huntington, S. P. (1993). "The Clash of Civilizations " *Foreign Affairs Journal* **72**: 27., 49

⁶ Spengler, O. (2007). *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*. Mannheim, Bibliographisches Institut.

culture of bygone times (i.e. Egyptian, Chinese, Indian, Maya) has eventually perished shortly after its high times. This downfall is inevitable for high cultures and will come after its blossom.

More generally, Spengler also formulates historic and philosophical theories, which are greatly influenced by Hegel. His theories are colored by the Western view on cultural definition and gives the impression of displaying a certain dominance and superiority. Published just after the First World War, his readers were thankful for a sense of hope and future orientation for cultural development, which Spengler was among the first to give in his theories.

An important factor of academic work is categorization and the formation of definitions. Every theorist introduced in this essay also does this. However, my personal opinion about definition of cultures is a slightly different.

I believe that it truly helps to categorize and define to understand the very general idea of some cultural habits, patterns, and traditions. Nevertheless, I doubt that a fixed definition and the continuous search of something of that sort, disregards the beauty and takes away the aspect of uncertainty that lets cultural differences enriches our lives on earth so greatly. It is the ability of cultures to constantly change and adjust to people's preferences wherever they are and whatever moves them. It is something that differs all over the world but nonetheless humankind manages to live together without extinguishing the human race. This moral barrier, the unwillingness to kill other people, is something that all people carry within. It connects us, and maybe even creates a global culture of humanity. Of course, there are many individuals, who do not respect the rules of the majority of people. In most countries though, offenses against the "culture of human nature"⁷ are being seen as against the will of most and thus, these people are being excluded from society for a certain time.

In his book *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha⁸ sees internationalization and globalization as key turning points for the contemporary perception of cultural definition. His theories say that humans live at *margins of cultural existence*⁹. The modern life challenges cultural identities by having people to deal with *intermediate spaces*¹⁰. The difficulty of one's individual cultural identity is to be found in the traditions of the culture of origin and impressions and differences of the cultures that surround the individual over the course of his/her lifetime. *Intermediate spaces* can be compared to an intercultural bridge¹¹ or staircase¹² – it connects origin and future, past and present. The idea of *intermediate spaces* contains the danger of sudden *unhomeliness*¹³ for people. It may arise with further new and thus unknown influences of aloof cultures. Nonetheless, the complexity of interaction of the factors *privacy, publicity, past, present, psychological factors, and society*¹⁴ (which shape *intermediate spaces*), also carries the potential to go beyond original dimensions of historically shaped cultures¹⁵, which then allows a global and contemporary - in the modern world necessary - view onto cultural diversity. It gives an individual the chance to adjust to his or her circumstances and environment. Furthermore, *intermediate spaces* (also called *hybridity*¹⁶) can lead through its flexibility and ability to adjust to personal circumstances to a global cultural identity. When lost in

⁷ I use the term "culture of human nature" for something that I see as common human values, which human beings around the world share and thus, unattached by cultural norms and conventions, are willing to agree upon. I see not killing one another as one of these values. When one person impinges against these rights, he will be excluded from society by being locked up in prison. Many of "culture of human nature" values are formulate in the UN Declaration of Human Rights. A difficulty that has to be mentioned here is that UN human rights is greatly influenced by western values and traditions. Therefore it is very difficult to use them as normative guidelines for everyone on the planet. Nonetheless it can be used as orientation for rightful actions which do not infringe the idea that every person is to be treated equally.

⁸ Bhabha, H. K. (2000). *Die Verortung der Kultur*. Tübingen, Stauffenburg Verlag.

⁹ Ref. ebd., 1

¹⁰ Ref. ebd., 5

¹¹ Ref. ebd., 7

¹² Ref. ebd., 5

¹³ Ref. ebd., 13

¹⁴ Ref. ebd., 20

¹⁵ Ref. ebd., 2

¹⁶ Ref. ebd., 5 ff.

unhomeliness people will search for a *global consensus*¹⁷ and solidarity with peers to make coexistence with individual cultural hybridity enjoyable for everyone.

This output of Bhabha's theory (which seems very reasonable to be) brings me to the conclusion that cultural differences do not necessarily have to lead to a model that *Huntington* calls *The Clash of Cultures*.

I believe, that by respecting one another every day, by seeing actions as a contribution to society and favoring without expecting to be rewarded for it (by building *cultural bridges* and *staircases* and accepting them as *contemporary cultural originals*), human nature will have the ability to include as many people into the "society of human kind" as possible. I am optimistic about the future of cultures, a life together with people from different cultures but again from the same culture. The culture of people¹⁸.



¹⁷ Ref. ebd., 28

¹⁸ based on definition of "culture of human nature"