

73. Towards an Anthropology of Conflict Resolution

Convenor:

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Inter-cultural conflicts are the result of prejudices and lack of appropriate communication. Hidden or explicit homophobia and (structural) racism are driven by both socio-political strategies and inter-cultural conflicts. The latter emerge by physical proximity of culturally distant individuals and groups. Against this background, cultural knowledge and conscience should be enhanced, to create positive forms of communication. This workshop explores on the one hand the specific anthropological approaches to inter-cultural communication and conflict resolution, on the other one anthropological methods for inter-cultural mediation. Conflict resolution means to develop proposals and strategies to resolve inter-cultural conflicts, while mediation means the direct intervention of the mediator in a conflict situation.

This workshop invites both empirically driven and theoretically informed papers which address the anthropological approach within the interdisciplinary field of conflict resolution and mediation. Papers which explore the following themes are especially welcome:

- Defining culture as a frame for cognition and behaviour
- Facing the nature of inter-cultural conflicts
- Conceptualizing an anthropology of conflict resolution
- Constructing methods of inter-cultural mediation.

Cultural Mediation: Communication in a multicultural society

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Cultural pluralism is one of the greatest challenges for the human community in the 21st century. It is over 50 years since T. Hall – the precursor of intercultural communication research – has described the difficulties that members of different cultures and races face when they are forced to go beyond the borders of their cultural *habitus*. Cultural mediation is one of the answers of a multicultural society for this challenge, in order to solve the problems that result from the proximity of very different cultures, to facilitate communication and to provoke a social change that would lead towards more integrated society.

In Europe the majority of cultural mediation services is based on NGOs' activity. The example of the Italian organisations will serve me to present intercultural mediation in practice: mediation that facilitates the contact and relations between the individuals, members of ethnic minority groups, and the state institutions. I shall also present an initial phase of cultural mediation in case of adaptation programme for the repatriate in Poland.

In Conflict with Complexity

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I would like to point out the enormous potential of the setting of the multiple counterparts which are effective in the process of conflict resolution. This setting can be considered as a metaphor for a progressive globalisation and simultaneously for the gaining of complexity in the sense of system theory. On the other hand I will try to reduce the topic at the same time to an interdisciplinary theoretical description. The enlargement by a “third perspective” brings out different modes of creating identity. Identities which are usually build up and secured on differences and which are actually more and more settled through multiple changing social, political, economic and cultural elements. Those differences can be mediated by new forms of communication.

Communication which stresses these differences in the sense of constructivism should transform messages - whether they are produced in words or not – to information. This information could be used to decrease the frightening border crossing complexity *and* is able to produce and reproduce cultural sense(s).

Is an inter-cultural conflict an intra-personal conflict and how can it be solved?

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In relationships generally, but particularly in inter-cultural relationships an inter-personal dynamic cannot be separated from an intra-personal dynamic. Especially in conflicts, the reflection of the intra-personal dynamic is crucial. And there is no difference to so called inter-cultural communication and problems.

This presentation will illustrate on a fictive inter-cultural example of conflict situation how the inner individual process can work and sets up a certain cognitive individual/collective approach of interaction. Thereby both the individual and collective reflexivity to culture as a frame for practice of verbal and non-verbal communication is intrinsically linked together.

The method chosen for this example is the Personal Existence-Analysis which is the theory for a psychotherapeutic method based on the theory of logotherapy by V.E. Frankl. This contribute emphasizes the possibility to turn a psychotherapeutic approach to an anthropological method. This might be a possibility to transform inter-cultural conflicts from “bottom up”.

The Anthropologist and Conflict Resolution

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This topic is a reflection over the role of the mediator in a inter-, intra-cultural and interpersonal mediation process. The assumption is made that in this context, the role of the mediator is equally important as that of the conflicting parties. It is not sufficient to simply apply acquired theoretical and methodological tools. There are many other questions which the mediator must deal with. It is necessary to reflect on one's own culturally influenced perceptions and the resulting attitudes, (pre)assumptions as well as one's own fears and defence mechanisms which could possibly be projected into the process.

What influence can one's presence and specifically one's own behaviour, have on the dynamics of the process?

To what extent can one rely on theories and methods and to what extent must one remain flexible?

How does one create acceptance for one's position as a mediator?

How does one handle the dynamics of a process in which understanding must be created under the premise of our inability to completely understand one another? These are but a few of the questions which must be posed. I believe that in answering these questions the field of anthropology can make an important contribution.

Intercultural Conflicts about how to deal with Conflicts

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Mediation booms in Austria, training institutes in mediation flourish and “win-win-solutions” have become popular in many fields. Conflicts are considered as normal happenings in daily life, the need to confront oneself with the opponent is emphasized, to attend to one’s own interests in an assertive manner and simultaneously to bear the needs of the opponent in mind is stressed. This behaviour is considered the “healthy” way to deal with conflicts, although mediations based on these premises on micro-levels usually leave structural violence and imbalances in power untouched. This culture-bound view conflicts with another view found in some other societies: “conflicts are not normal, they do harm to the society, conflicts should be avoided, harmony should be preserved, modesty and self-restraint are the norm”. Mediators in intercultural settings may be unsuccessful or make the situation worse, if they fail to realize such fundamental differences (in the case they exist). The western concept of mediation is part of the social construction of “conflict” including theories about the “human nature” and “natural human relationships”. This culture-specific social construction of “conflict” may itself be object of intercultural conflicts.

Non-understanding – Missunderstanding – Conflict? Japanese – European Encounters

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Nowadays, more and more people get in touch and have to deal with people from other cultures. European – Japanese encounters for example are steadily increasing, especially in the field of business and tourism.

The encounters are often extremely superficial and allow only a glimpse to a certain or "staged" behaviour, which is often the base for stereotypes. These "pictures in our head" are sometimes a sign of non-understanding and may vanish when contact becomes closer, but they may also block, lead to misunderstanding and in the worst case to conflict, to inter-cultural conflict. To avoid this, it is absolutely necessary to take a closer look to the culture and their rules and values we have to deal with. A view behind the curtain, to the "backstage" area, will help to understand what happens in front of the curtain, on "stage" and in the best case, it will make us able to act and react in an appropriate way.

In this contribution I will try to offer a look to the "backstage" area of Japanese culture and thereby highlight certain Japanese behaviour with the aim to facilitate Japanese-European face-to-face contacts.

Conflict Resolution in a Globalised Sudan

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In 2000, a clandestine book appeared in the streets of Sudan. The book was based on an impressive array of statistics arguing that Sudan is controlled by mere three ethnic groups that come from a single administrative region that constitutes a mere 5% of Sudan’s population. Domination of these ethnic groups over the country has remained

consistent irrespective of political orientation of different governments that ruled the Sudan since Independence, 1956. The book provided intellectual base for a new Sudanese armed struggle in western Sudan. This is the youngest civil war in Africa, dating back to the year 2003.

The author argues that what we are witnessing here is a rebirth of (cultural/ethnic) differences arising as a direct result of globalisation and its ensuring release of ethnic consciousness, right of political representation and liberal democracy. The contribution is call for a renewed effort to assess the role of communication and conflict resolution in the present era of globalisation.

Conflict resolution in the Moroccan High Atlas

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Based on many years of ethnographic research on a Berber-speaking tribal group in central Morocco, this paper attempts to reconstruct the functioning of conflict resolution before the establishment of the French protectorate (1933 in the region). The precolonial period was characterized by the total absence of state-enforced law. Nevertheless, in addition to tribal customary law, Islamic law also was locally available for handling legal affairs. Ideally, customary and Islamic law were seen as distinct and opposing legal systems. In day-to-day conflict resolution, despite certain obvious contradictions, they overlapped and crosscut in complex ways. Conflicting parties could resort to several institutions for arbitration and reconciliation– saints, tribal arbiters, customary specialists, experts in Islamic law – which differed in the basic logic they relied on. They provided different but not conflicting paths to justice. One important insight is that there was no public sanction for crimes, but this did not apply to other local groups in the region. To conclude, the changes brought about for legal practice by French colonisation and by Moroccan independence are outlined.

