

## **Capacity for Otherness in Pluri-Identity Societies**

Walter Lichem

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### **Fundamental changes in the structures and interaction patterns of our societies**

The recent decades have been marked by a continued decrease in interstate conflicts and wars. Yet at the same time new challenges on our security agenda have emerged which are related to processes of intra-societal disintegration. These societal challenges and the related lack of security, rule of law and of a public sense of common purpose have, however, not yet been fully addressed in national and international policies and programmes of action. Societal disintegration reflects to some extent the various fundamental changes in our societies, including the widening gaps in income and related marginalisations, the renewed enhancement of religious faith as an element of identity, the affirmation of different cultures and of ethnic and linguistic identities. These dimensions of “difference” occur at a time when we are living an ever denser integration of spaces and of their societies related to each other in trans-national patterns of interaction and growing interdependence. The emerging economic, political, identity disparities become politically pertinent as they are lived not only in their social, economic, religious, cultural and linguistic but increasingly in their societal dimension. The issue of identity has become a central element in the search for belonging and community.

These developments are to be understood in the context of societal change extending over several centuries providing the human being with a rising degree of self-determinedness of his/her personal and community identities. De-verticalisation of societies provided for the replacement of command and obedience relations (e.g. feudal governance, patriarchy) by societal patterns of equality and inter-action.

### **The societalisation and individualisation of “otherness”**

While traditional nation-state (or civilisation-) thinking saw the other/the enemy beyond the boundaries of national territory otherness is now right amongst us, an inherent element of our societies in practically all regions and countries of the world. Global processes of integration and multi-dimensional patterns of interaction have brought otherness into the presence of our societies requiring a fundamental restructuring of value patterns. Traditional societies had provided the individual with vertically predetermined dimensions of identity – language, ethnicity, faith, living space, profession etc. creating societal cohesion by obedience and serfdom. The challenge of societal structures in post-feudal societies was responded to with the myth of the single-identity nation-state reintroducing new command and obedience structures by declaring the “other” as the enemy and threat to one’s own identity. Nation-state societies are marked by an a priori rejection of all dimensions of the other - from ethnicity, to language, culture etc.

Today, however, identity is the result of individualized development processes marked by personal decisions, patterns of interaction, learning and socialisation bringing about a certain “de-localisation” of identity determination, i.e. identity is not any more primarily space-defined but rather the result of individual development. These changes have been further accentuated by enhanced professional mobility and migration, ICT and the personal living with and of a plurality of identities. Multilingualism and pluri-

lingualism have been logical results of these processes of change which are to be understood not only in linguistic terms but also in their societal significance. The result is not only a plurality of identities in a society but also in a personality. The corner stone of societal cohesion in the pluri-identity society is the pluri-identity personality.

This means, however, that the myth of the single-identity society, based often on blood identity or obedience-based cohesion ignores our societal developments and current realities. The “civilization”-related discourse in academia and in global policy processes has proved to be rather non-sense.

The political plurality of our democratic systems is complemented by linguistic, religious, ethnic, cultural plurality. The myth of the single-identity nation-state society with all citizens supposedly sharing the same ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural identity belongs to the past though overcoming nationalism is still a challenge in many societies and in their patterns of international interaction. Both the supposed “clash of civilizations” and the consequent “dialogue among civilizations” seem to be based on geographically defined single-identity spaces a reality which is true only from a perspective of yesterday and of the dark moments of history.

### **The relativisation of identities in pluri-identity societies**

A major consequence of identity plurality in our societies is the “relativisation” of identities. While the single-identity society of the nation-state considers its own identity as absolute and unchangeable, the pluri-identity society is marked by a continuous individualisation and hence relativisation of identity. This relativisation is based on the societalisation of the plurality of identities as well as on the recognition that one’s own identity is constantly subject to change as a consequence of interactions with otherness. The result of this development is the emergence of pluri-identity societies with a growing number of persons able to reach into and internalize a plurality of identities and developing “pluri-identity personalities”.

The de-verticalisation of our societal structures, moving from command and obedience to self-determined patterns of interaction with other human beings, communities and identities has given new significance to the societal dimension of our development. With the citizen becoming the primary actor, perpetrator and victim of global change the societal dimension, i.e. the relational capacities of each person is becoming a factor of growing significance in our local, national and global agendas.

In fact, peace and security, economic development, the sustainable development and use of our environmental and natural resources is ever more defined by each person’s capacity to relate.

What is the meaning of the term “societal”? What is the difference between “societal” and “social”. The traditional concept of “social” refers to the productive dimensions of the human being and of communities, such as health, education, age, gender, hunger, poverty etc. The term “societal” in turn refers to the relational capacity of persons with other human beings, with other identities, the capacity for community, for the common good, for public space, for peace, for friendship, for cross-identification and the resulting capacity for solidarity a key element for cohesion and of any type of community. The societal capacities in a community include also the capacity to forgive and to integrate the other into a community as well as the capacity to be accepted and integrated. To the extent that all areas of public and private action have an impact on society at large, societal capacities have assumed an ever more central role in addressing the challenges of our time. The essence of the societal dimension is the capacity for otherness.

The challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not be met without recognising and addressing their societal dimension. The new peace, security and development agendas require concrete policies and programmes

for strengthening the relational capacities in our societies. The new patterns of wars and violence but also such phenomena as the burning events in Paris and in London, the smashed shop windows in Temuco are related to societal changes in which the failing societal cohesion and the lack of integration of marginalized groups and identities have become the visible challenge of our societies. The response to this development emerging in many different societies has been the construction of walls, barbed wires around urban settlements leading to a “gating” of societies with a sharp rise in private security services. In Ecuador the private sector’s security budget is 40 % above the national budget allocation for security services. These phenomena accentuate however rather the process of societal disintegration than providing long-term security and cohesion.

### **The societal dimension of peace and security**

Wars and violent conflicts occur today primarily within societies, within state borders and not between sovereign states. Causes of these conflicts are to be found in the diversity of different ethnic, religious, linguistic identities and communities who are “tolerated” as “minorities” and are given only limited rights to live their particularity. Majorities often work rather on assimilating other identities and are inclined to deny their plurality.

More than one third of the member countries of the United Nations are today suffering from violent processes of disintegration with civil wars and acts of terrorism shaping their security agenda. The *War List* of the Center for Systemic Peace in Washington D.C. reveals that during the past two decades more than 97 % of victims of war were suffered in intra-state conflicts in 65 countries of all regions of the world. Between 1999 and 2008 the Center registered 71 military conflicts of which only 6 took place between sovereign states. Of the 2,6 million victims of war, 2,5 million were suffered in internal conflicts. In this context it is important to note the interrelationship emerging between civil wars and violence and such other societal phenomena as organized crime, illegal drug dealings, trading of human beings, forced recruitment of children into private armies etc. Their organisation, financing and the crosscutting relations into the political violence reflect the degree of disintegration suffered in these societies.

Terrorism is another most visible phenomenon of societal violence and insecurity with traditional dimensions of state military power being often unable to provide the necessary security. Terrorism thus also reflects the societal disintegration, increasingly at an international level with certain governments having declared a state of war against terrorist organisations which operate transnationally including from within their own territory.

### **Societal disintegration and economic development**

The process of societal disintegration is both the result of unequal and often inequitable economic development but also of increasing significance for the economic development as an infrastructural impediment. Income gaps have increased in almost all societies of industrial and of developing countries. According to the recent OECD report *Growing Unequal? Income Distribution and Poverty in OECD Countries* there has also been growing economic inequality within the societies of 27 of the 30 OECD member countries over the past 10 years. The report underlines the economic significance of rising inequality. Economic growth is rather impeded. Inequality constrains social mobility and limits the economic productivity of a society. The resultant internal tensions and the weakening of democracy ultimately lead to developments which are negative for the economy. In countries which are marked by rising societal disintegration and growing insecurity investments are being reduced with international investors moving to other countries.

At the same time successfully structured pluri-identity societies have often a record of economic development above average. The immigration societies of North and South America used to benefit from the broad spectrum of background of its migrants and refugees. A current day example is Malaysia whose population is composed of Malays and other indigenous identities, Chinese and Indians and which between 1970 and 1990 counted among the 10 countries of the world with the highest economic growth. Similarly Mauritius with a plurality of African, South Asian and European identities composing its society has been first ranking among African countries in the UNDP Human Development Index of the 2008/2009 Human Development Report.

Societal disintegration, however, is also marked by social consequences with those affected by poverty being marginalised even further. Children are to be seen as primary losers. A lack of equitably available health services accentuates the awareness of societal injustice and marginalisation. The exclusion of HIV/AIDS infected may in fact reflect the overall societal conditions of a community.

### **Societal cohesion and rule of law**

The capacity of a society to assure an effective system of rule of law relies to a considerable extent on its societal culture and capacities. Any respect for legal norms implies the recognition of the rights of the other as well as an understanding of the common good and of justice in a society. Violations of law such as organized crime, corruption and tax evasion are ultimately nothing else but an expression of the societal failure of a community. Corruption also tends to annihilate the effectiveness of a democratic, competitive and market society.

### **Sustainability and societal responsibility**

The challenges of sustainably using our natural and environmental resources endowment will not be met without certain minimal societal capacities in the intra-societal and inter-generational internalisation of the related externalities. We must recognize that in particular with regard to the use of natural resources it is the single person who is both perpetrator and victim of the changes of our environmental systems. A culture of environmental responsibility requires however a certain degree of societal responsibility as an element our values and societal culture.

As we assess the agenda and the results of the Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change we are aware that the realisation of the principle of sustainability at local national and global levels is to be recognized as one of the central objectives of the agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The consequences of trans-sectoral, trans-national and the trans-generational transfers of externalities of the unsustainable exploitation of natural and environmental resources such as in international river basins or international marine and coastal ecosystems are becoming ever clearer. Climate change has to be understood as not only requiring societal development in both mitigation and adaptation strategies but, as articulated in the working paper of the EU High Representative of 3 March 2008 on „*Climate Change and International Security*“, has also very clear societal implications – such as the growing number of environmental refugees which are presented in this report as a threat to European security.

### **The societal dimension of cultural development**

To understand “otherness” as an asset, as an advantage is of central importance in the area of culture. Societies who are open to the diversity of the world live development. Those who stick to a static concept of cultural identity ultimately remain marginalised, without development and without real creativity. Vienna’s cultural history is an example in this regard. As a capital of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Austro-Hungarian Empire Vienna was one of the prime European centres for cultural and intellectual

creativity. When after World War I it was reduced to the single-identity myth of one of the successor nation-states its identity-simplicity quickly brought the end of Vienna as a cultural centre.

### **The indispensability of “societal development”**

Keeping in mind the fundamental importance of the societal quality for peace and security, for economic, social and cultural development as well as with regard to our natural resources and environmental sustainability, “societal development” has to be seen as the fourth pillar in addressing our common future. The report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the 2005 Summit Meeting of the General Assembly has presented the societal dimension of our Global Agenda under the heading “human rights” as being of central significance and a core element for security and peace as well as for human development.

The current trend towards societal disintegration and its implications for the international agenda spectrum need a new recognition. Societal cohesion and capacities for inter-societal and inter-generational responsibility cannot be the result of learning from the painful failures in the past but must be the objective of concrete policies and strategies of development. How can we build capacities for otherness of a human being, of a society?

The capacity for otherness has to be understood as the core element of societal development, the capacity to understand what is different, foreign, not as a threat but as a source for development, for enrichment, as an asset.

### **Otherness**

What then is the “other” and what is “one-self”. Are not all human beings who develop their lives with a certain degree of self-determination “different”, the “other”? Why are many societies still sticking to the categories of the nation-state considering the ethnic, religious, linguistic or cultural “other” as a threat, a threat to their identity, to their human security and their survival? Traditional socialisation into the concept of otherness related it to the enemy on the other side of the national border. In that sense, xenophobia also served as an important mechanism in the affirmation of authority providing the justification for structures of command and submissiveness through hatred, rejection and violent conflicts.

Yet, how correct are these traditional ideas of the nation-state? Did this myth of the single-identity society/“civilization not overlook the very natural diversity of identities present in every society – man/woman, old/young, rich/poor, urban/rural etc. Is any interaction with otherness to be associated with a loss of identity or is it not rather a source for the development of identity? Is the “one-self” always the friend which assures security and an affirmation of existence?

### **The evolution of our international policy discourse**

Yet our international agenda has been marked by repeated failures to understand and respond to the challenges of our global, regional, national and local plurality of identities. Gross violations of human rights, mass denials of human dignity, racism, religious intolerance and inequality, ethnically defined processes of exclusion, expulsion, enmity have entered ever more prominently our awareness and have become part of our global agendas and of the work of international institutions.

The Council of Europe has dealt with the new intercontinental identity plurality of Europe already in its Paris Conference on “Le Tiers Monde parmi nous” in 1988. Dialogue events between Christian religions and Islam have been convened in Vienna since 1993. It was Samuel P. Huntington’s “Clash of

Civilizations” first published in the summer 1993 edition of *Foreign Affairs* and then in his book published in 1997 that turned societal otherness into one of the core issues of today’s international policy discourse, a development that was further accentuated by the terror attacks of 9-11.

Iranian President Seyed Mahammad Khatami articulated an answer to Huntington’s thesis of “clash” by proposing to the United Nations General Assembly to foster a “dialogue among civilizations”. A unanimously adopted resolution declared the year 2001 to be an “International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations”. The UN Secretary-General appointed an international Panel of personalities under the chairmanship of former Undersecretary-General Giandomenico Picco to articulate how bridges can be built between different identities. On the basis of the Panel’s report *Crossing the Divide* governments, the UN system of organisations and programmes were invited to organize cultural and educational programmes on the topic of “dialogue among civilizations” It is interesting in this context that the Panel which included such prominent personalities as Lourdes Arizpe, Prince Hassan Bin Talal, Richard von Weizsäcker and Jaques Delors decided at the beginning of its first meeting not to discuss either of the two concepts of the UN mandate. The opinion was articulated by the participants that both “dialogue” or “civilizations” rather reflected a concept of single-identity cultural spaces and not the pluri-identity reality of our globalized world. How could you define “dialogue” in a society consisting of plurality of identities? Who is spokesperson in such “dialogue”? What is a “civilization” in a world where cultures and forms of life, values and beliefs share a common space? And which cultural systems would qualify as a civilization keeping in mind that only in Africa 2000 different languages are spoken reflecting the tremendous cultural diversity on this continent.

UNESCO has dealt with the topic of cultural plurality/diversity in numerous conferences, seminars, world reports and publications. The report of World Commission on Culture and Development presented to UNESCO argued very clearly that cultural diversity was to be seen as an advantage of fundamental importance for development. The UNESCO General Conference adopted in 2001 The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and in 2005 the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. This Convention clearly articulates that “cultural diversity creates a rich and varied world, which increases the range of choices and nurtures human capacities and values” declaring cultural diversity a “common heritage of humanity” to be preserved for the benefit of all. UNESCO’s recent World Report *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue* considers it of urgency to invest in cultural diversity and dialogue. UNESCO will also play a key role in 2010 in the celebration of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures.

Six months after the terrorist attack in Madrid in March 2004 the Prime Minister of Spain Rodriguez Zapatero presented to the United Nations General Assembly a call for an “Alliance of Civilizations”. The intention of this initiative was to increase and further develop world awareness to the risks that a wall of misunderstandings between the West and the Arab/Islamic world may cause. Zapatero invited the Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan to jointly sponsor this initiative in the United Nations. The UN Secretary-General launched then formally the “Alliance of Civilizations” on 14 July 2005. Also this initiative foresaw the appointment of a High-level Group of personalities which presented a report the following year. The report recommends the development of partnerships in the framework of the Alliance of Civilizations with international organizations that share its goals. The report refers in this context especially to the European Union, the OSCE, UNESCO, the OIC, the League of Arab States, ISESCO, UCLG, UNWTO as well as other international and national organizations, public and private.

The Alliance of Civilizations has since led to a broad range of concrete operational programmes and a certain institutionalisation of dialogue and educational events including the Forum of the Alliance of Civilization which was held in Madrid, Spain, in 2008 and in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2009 attended by about one thousand official delegations as well as representatives from civil society and academia.

## **From single-identity “civilizations” to pluri-identity societies**

The idea of geographically defined cultural spaces (“civilisations”, “Islamic world”, “Christian West”) has still been rather prevalent while the reality is that with the exception of repressive regimes with no or very limited interaction with the world most countries have become pluri-identity societies with a growing number of persons disposing of a pluri-identity personality.

The current process of growing international integration, communication, migration and trans-national interactions has created a situation where otherness is not anymore the unknown foreigner beyond the national borders but where otherness has become part of our daily societal reality. Otherness is next door and part of our urbanized identities and culture. In Vienna 31.5 % of its population is not Austrian-born. Salzburg is the permanent home to 148 different passports, figures that are very similar in other European cities.

Otherness in the media, in ICT-based communication, in globalized culture is seen by some as a threat, as an act of humiliation and denial of one’s own identity and values. At the same time prejudicial perceptions of other ways of life limit the capacity to understand and to be enriched by the world’s plurality of identities.

Europe’s identity is to some extent an example of such societal developments. Integrating a plurality of national, ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic identities Europe’s identity can be based only on an affirmation of otherness. Any type of fence that some want to build on the outside of their national identity or of a Europe (Christian or racially defined) ultimately contradicts the very essence of European identity and the key slogan of the European integration that defined itself as a process towards “unity in diversity”.

There are already twice as many Muslims in the European Union as there are Austrians. According to the language research institute Lingua Dom in Barcelona there are currently 400 different languages spoken in this Catalan city. Geneva is home to a society where 257 different languages are spoken. And languages are only one, though an important dimension of identity.

## **Building capacity for otherness**

It is noteworthy that the international policy discourse and to a considerable extent also academic discourse have been limited to identifying the general conceptual framework of the issues related to the plurality of identities. There has, however, been a rather limited response to the question of how capacity for otherness can be developed in our societies and on a global scale.

The international community had dealt with the various issues of societal cohesion in several contexts. Human rights, racism, gender equality, the issue of indigenous populations, languages and cultures have been addressed in policy documents and legal instruments, by providing a special focus on these issues through of international decades, years, days, but also in operational programmes and institutional development. UNESCO addressed the issue of human rights education already with the Vienna International Congress on the Teaching of Human Rights in 1978 followed by the Montreal Congress on Education for Human Rights and Democracy which led in 1994 to the proclamation by the United Nations of the International Decade for Human Rights Education 1995-2004. The United Nations launched a World Programme for Human Rights Education in 2005 and 2009 was declared the International Year for Human Rights Learning. Yet in general – keeping in mind the need to address societal capacities of citizens on a global scale - action has rather been limited.

A pertinent example of societal development through human rights learning are the human rights cities. A joint report of UN-HABITAT and PDHRE was presented to the World Urban Forum in Nanjing, China, in November 2008. The report presents examples of how human rights related socialization processes, learning and education programmes can be taken as a tool for re-integrating societies fragmented by civil war, genocide or military dictatorships. There are now 25 human rights cities in Africa, Latin America, North America and Europe. Washington DC also became human rights city on 10 December 2008.

This approach and the related programmes still need broader support by governmental authorities, the private sector and by civil society. Living a human rights culture provides societies with that “larger freedom” which is the core goal of the development processes taking place in all our societies. Human rights are to be understood as the constitutional cornerstone of our international, regional and national communities. In fact, the (unanimous) adoption of the principle of the Responsibility to Protect by the 2005 UN Summit meeting in 2005 put the protection of human rights in case of failed state responsibility for its citizens even above the principle of national sovereignty which once was considered the very basis on which the international system was to be built.

The response to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century of societal disintegration is therefore not to be found in inter-civilizational “dialogues” but in the operationalisation of the development of a universally shared culture in all societies based on common values and behavioural patterns providing human dignity, freedom from marginalisation and exclusion, humiliation, hatred and consequent intra-societal violence. Educational, learning and socialization processes have to be developed and implemented to provide our societies for these basic capacities for peace, security and sustainable inter-generational development and solidarity for our common future.