

## **Prof. Dr. Constantin von Barloewen**

### **Culture as a Factor of “Realpolitik”**

1. The Cultural Dimension of Globalization The end of the deadlock between the Eastern and Western blocs does not mark the dawn of what might even be a stable world order, but merely reveals a world of a fundamentally different complexity. The term modernity is, in this connection, one of the group of theories that both claim and strive to be universally applicable. On the one hand, we are experiencing globalization in the domain of digital communication, media technologies and finance; on the other hand, we are - like an anthropological thermostat - experiencing a fragmentation and Balkanization in the political domain due to ethnic and religious conflicts the world over, secular and religious nationalisms and fundamentalist movements of every religious persuasion, which threaten to lay waste to the countries concerned. We are faced with new enmities along geopolitical and geocultural lines, with an ethnicization, as it were, of international political and economic relations. Compared to the 19th century, nation-states are losing de facto sovereignty to the worldwide virtualization of the economy; the ongoing structural changes are giving rise to an economy without any clear location - one which calls for a *Weltinnenpolitik*, or global domestic policy, as coined by Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker.

We are witnessing, concomitantly, the impoverishment and economic marginalization of large parts of the world: in sub-Saharan Africa, but also in parts of Latin America, such as Ecuador at present, and in parts of Asia and the Near East. Increasingly, global politics is revolving around an Archimedean point: the relation to the other, the connection between views of the other and the self, with modern identities growing more decentralized and ultimately more disparate. As the century draws to a close, in the wake of the disappearance of the dualistic East-West antagonism by which geopolitical identity was previously informed, collective identities and conflicts are flaring up all over the world - increasingly with cultural and religious features. Current affairs demonstrate how contradictory the processes of globalization are. The concept of culture as an identity-forming whole, as a consensual unity, is vanishing from global politics. Cultural globalization is now embedded in the contradictory context of national boundaries, on the one hand, and supranational political, technological and economic processes, on the other. It turns out that homogenization and differentiation are occurring simultaneously. The question is how a convergence might look between cultural legacy and technological innovation, between traditional culture and modernization. At the turn of the millennium, billions of people do not consider their cultural identity in a multipolar world to be secure, but contradictory and subject to ongoing change.

The major players in international politics and business are bringing a vehement exogenous pressure to bear on the world outside of Europe and North America to modernize. This is what makes the phenomenon of modernization so divisive, for it calls into question

the very foundations and values upon which traditional economies are based. Cultures and societies caught up in the throes of modernization are increasingly beleaguered by internal conflict. This is particularly true of the traditional cultures in the Caucasus, in Islamic cultures, in what remains of the archaic African cultures, and in parts of Latin America and Asia. Mental ruptures are surfacing - and asserting, so to speak, the human right of cultural development. On the threshold of the 21st century, cultural struggles in the form of virulent political and economic conflict over the nature of order in the public domain have become a reality of the global civilization. The upshot is a mobilization of "identity politics" in all the founder religions and all cultures. The protest against Western modernity and the political instrumentation of identity is giving rise to fundamentalist conflicts, to widespread atrocities from Algiers to Afghanistan, from the Sudan to India. In view of the growing cultural complexity, one wonders how the world is to cope with the sheer variety of identities. Culture is increasingly becoming a controversial factor of regulative policy - from Chechnya to Kosovo.

On the one hand, it is the very perception of differences between cultures that has elicited calls for the intercultural dialogue that will have to precede any governmental political action and consequently is of such global political urgency - particularly as the great schism vanishes from the face of the earth. The world is like a field on which disparate forces move around and suddenly pick up a virtually unstoppable momentum. Totality has gone out of control. Globalization has led not to "cultural unification", but to technological standardization, uniformity without any real unity. What has emerged is not a culture of global security, but an assortment of possibilities allowing diverse identities to exist. To coin a phrase, let us call it the "absolute present": today's culture is no longer the culture of a place, but that of a time.

Present-day fundamentalist tendencies essentially take the form of anti-modernism. We are faced with a politicization of cultural differences. The culture at the close of the century is one of dealing with differences, though not always according to the dictates of the West. Cultural self-awareness is becoming the springboard for political jingoism in the interest of bolstering the power of identity. Increasingly radical movements are gaining a sense of self-assurance in a wide range of cultures, whilst it is safe to say that the search for new sources of identity has become a universal pursuit. Identity - and this is where the danger lies - always exists only in contradistinction to the other. The fundamentalist tendencies are but the extreme form of the politicization of cultural differences. The dynamics of modernization in each particular society corresponds to its own logic of modernization. The pole of uniform universality has been lost in our global civilization, now supplanted by a multitude of universalities vying with one another for absolute supremacy.<sup>2</sup> The Cultural and Historical Preconditions of the Global Economy As long as the international stock markets bounce right back after each crisis to reach a new plateau, a deceptive calm prevails in a realm one may call economically aseptic. The latest economic crises, particularly those of 1997 and '98 in Asia, Russia and Brazil, which, according to leading economists, brought the international financial system right up to the brink of a global crisis, did not provoke any really searching self-criticism on the part of the global players or any profound

structural analysis of the underlying factors. But they did make one thing clear: that the central credo, viz. the liberalism of global economic development in its unadulterated positivistic form, was not an infallible dogma and could not be casually implanted in all the economies of the world without considering the necessary cultural and religious conditions. Cultural values came to be seen as the primordial precondition even for the flow of international financial capital. Hence, a truly realistic assessment of security strategies and risks would encompass all the factors - i.e. including culture and religion - that influence economics and politics. There was talk of an “early warning system”, and German President Roman Herzog even spoke of culture as a “security-policy imperative”.

What are the errors and failures of the global economic players who believe in the pure quantification of people in the form of capital flows? A few examples will speak for themselves: Latin America, for instance, has a deep-rooted cultural history of its own and a powerful transcendental metaphysics that goes back as far as the Catholic scholasticism of the 16th century. Afro-Brazilian cults such as Macumba and Condomble, as practiced by millions of people, espouse a work ethic and a conception of thought and action that are worlds apart from the empirical, pragmatic, worldly culture of Calvinist North America with its 17th century doctrine of predestination and the legacy of John Locke's natural law that laid the foundations for the individual right of ownership. It goes without saying that the preconditions for the acceptance of modern analytical technologies are very different in those cultures. We must ask ourselves a simple and elementary question: why is a certain kind of development possible in Europe or North America but not - or at least not in the same way - in Kenya, Saudi Arabia or Brazil? It is a matter of really understanding - for purposes of financial analyses as well - every single factor that might be crucial to the maintenance of a polity and economy. The cultural history dimension turns out to have been not only underestimated by realpolitik but also indispensable to grasping the actual internal dynamics of a society and its economy. The problems that beset world finance in 1997 and 1998 have by no means been resolved. On the contrary, they have only been covered up, mentally repressed till the next crisis, which - as the analysts agree - will prove far more severe. It is both astonishing and alarming how little the global players learn from these crises. The preventive credit lines granted by the World Bank and IWF act upon the symptoms, not the causes of the problems. The system was manicured, but no structural measures were taken to allow for the consideration of long-term underlying effects of cultural and religious history. That failure revealed the incapacity for self-criticism on the part of the major financial players, their inability to adopt a holistic perspective.

From a geopolitical standpoint, the world today offers us a picture of widespread disorder. On the one hand, there is the rise of economic organizations at a transnational level, from Mercosur to the European Union, from APEC to NAFTA. On the other hand, minorities are striving to gain political power and demanding independence. Most of the conflicts at the turn of the century are internal: from Algeria to Albania, Chechnya to Bosnia, Kurdistan to Afghanistan, from the Sudan to Rwanda and East Timor. What is more, the economic inequality between the North and South is widening, with 20 percent of the world population receiving 80 percent of the world's income.

The financial markets are spinning an invisible virtual net across the planet. It is no longer possible for any country to isolate itself from the rest of the planet. And nobody can continue to ignore the fact that this is a period of ruptures and reshuffles affecting geostrategic power, economic and political players, and above all cultural forces. The danger signals are becoming more and more noticeable, blotting out the great hope of a new world order. It was dead on arrival, as we now know. National economies are moving in ways that undermine predictability. As we slide into the next century, all any of us can say for sure is that uncertainty has become the only certainty we have. The profound structural crisis of developing societies reveals how painful the transition to modernity is. In the name of the total world market, laws are enacted that govern the entire planet. The pulsating virtual cash flows obey only the imperative of an economic rationality, an organism without a heart or body: indeed, the volume of financial transactions is ten times greater than the volume of real trade in goods and services. It is truly alarming - the degree to which the financial economy exceeds the real economy and has broken loose from democratically legitimized power and responsibility. Two parameters of world power constitute the pillars upon which the world rests: the market and communication. Globality, permanence, immediacy and immateriality are the determining phenomena of the digital and global era. What we are witnessing is the eclipse of reason and a flight into ever more elusive political and economic imponderables - imponderable developments that are liable to implode because the great historical processes of bifurcation cannot be extrapolated into the future. Borrowing from de Tocqueville's phrase the "tyranny of the masses", our present plight might be termed a tyranny of the market and of communication.

### 3. The Anthropological Perspective and the Cultural Dimension of Development

So why is a paradigm shift absolutely essential for approaching politics and economics from the standpoint of *realpolitik*? What insights will be gained by embracing the cultural and anthropological dimensions of politics and economics?

One of the most striking features of human life is the extraordinary diversity of lifestyles. The consensus among anthropologists is to use the term "culture" to denote these diverse ways of life. Thus, questions of culture have to do with how and why people differ in their ways of life, culminating in an attempt to define what is quintessentially "human" about the species. The anthropological perspective subsumes in a holistic manner the social, political and economic spheres under the heading of "culture" and draws connections between the biological makeup of man and his historical and cultural dimension. Culture always means the totality of material and ideational facets of a given society.

To be effective in the long term, economic and development policy has to be based on a penetrating analysis of the dominant cultural factors of the society in question, from which operational "planning elements" can then be derived. More and more frequently the global players in politics and economics are finding that their objectives are hardly achieved, if at all, by development projects that have been "correctly" planned in the technical sense. They find these projects failing due to inefficiency. It would seem reasonable to conclude that the planning to date has neglected specific conditions which, though technically difficult to identify and evaluate, have a decisive impact. This is where the cultural factors

come in, which form not so much a statistical series as a flexible symbolic system that may or may not be conducive to development. The only way to ensure the sustainability of economic and development projects is through selective analyses of the cultural environment.

Cultures can only be understood on their own terms, by their own standards of value. Culture is not so much a product of man and his mental activities; rather, man is a product of his culture. The economist, too, must assume that every known reality is a cultural reality in terms of the characteristic values expressed in the logic of thought and action and shaping perception, human experience and consequently economic activity. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, for example, Western economists in Russia were confronted with the deep-seated influence of centuries-old traditions when, after years of implanting a “capitalist market economy”, they finally had to admit that the endogenous structures were not ready at all for the shock therapy they had planned.

There is a reciprocal relationship between cultural difference and the different level of development of national economies, on the basis of culturally specific development processes and objectives. Culture appears to be a virtually endless archive of differences. At the end of the 20th century we are witnessing the phenomenon of the emergence of a postnational political order, as well as the valorization of cultural differences, or rather: the phenomenon of difference itself. It is possible that homogenous units, as created by the system of nation-states, will no longer arise. Heterogeneous units will gain in strength, i.e. cultural groups such as the Latinos in the United States or the Chinese in Singapore, along with interest groups such as the proliferating NGOs and other public law entities; and in view of this heterogeneity it will not be easy to establish conventions and laws of an appropriate scope.

Thus, economy is a product of cultural and religious traditions; there can be no isolated universal rationality, not even for the applicability of economics. This is where the nexus to anthropology lies. A few instances should suffice. Why is the savings-income ratio 50 percent in Singapore, but only 9 percent in Mexico? How influential is the Asian Confucian tradition as opposed to that of a predominantly Roman Catholic culture? The logic of thought and action is peculiar to a particular place and time. To assess risks accurately on a truly long-term basis, a geocultural atlas of the world would be desirable for international investment and locational decisions as well as for the leading rating organizations and for the assessment of country risks.

A people's inclination to invest and take risks will depend, at bottom, on whether their culture is oriented toward the past or future: they may concentrate on “being here now”, seek contentment in contemplation or attach great importance to action. These propensities will determine their innovativeness, entrepreneurial dynamism, technological aptitude, investment behavior and organization. The compatibility of technology with culture and religion is the most decisive factor. It makes a world of difference whether technology is to be acculturated in Latin America with its heavily transcendentalist culture since the Catholic scholasticism of the 16th century, or in India with the concept of karma and reincarnation

and the effects this has on the organization of work; in Japan with its tradition of Shintoism and decision by consensus; or in the Calvinist culture of North America with its Puritan legacy of a “city upon a hill”, “manifest destiny” and its faith in material success in this life with further rewards in the next.

Clearly, a synergistic force was generated by the combination of the consistently empirical, analytical, logical technology of the Western type with the pragmatism of American intellectual history from William James to John Dewey or the social Darwinism of a Herbert Spencer in the 19th century. Such pragmatism was unknown in the history of Latin American thought, whose orientation was metaphysical and otherworldly for four centuries, from Jos© Vasconcelos in Mexico to Faz Britto in Brazil. Why is this important to economics? Because the values of a culture are concentrated in its intellectual history as in a focusing mirror and take on vital importance for the society as a whole. Every national economy has its own “cultural assets”. Economic and development policy is more than just technological transfer. Development projects in emerging countries often fail due to the uncritical adoption of development criteria from industrial societies. Various cultural factors are decisive: the basic religious structures, conception of the deity, myths; ancestor worship in Africa (and elsewhere) from Madagascar to Nigeria; the relationship between man and nature, the supernatural and death; the attitude toward the environment as the basis of an ecological conception of the self; the relationship to time, land and property, to acceptance of authority and rule, to the pursuit of profit, growth and achievement, to novelty in general (an index of acceptance of technological innovations); a sense of the future, the ability to form an elite, the ways in which decisions are made.

With regard to all these factors, the question is to what extent they are conducive or inimical to the development of a state and its economy. Development is possible and sustainable only as part of an overall cultural renewal; otherwise it will remain unconnected to the decisive life-lines of the people, not integrated but fragmented, and it may give rise to fundamentalist and anti-modernistic movements, as has been the case for years in Algeria and Iran, for example. Economic and development policies can only succeed if the cultural factors are identified and addressed at an operative level. The cultures of emerging countries do not always fit in with the linear view of history and progress that informed the evolution of the West, from Herodotus to Thucycides, from Vico to Herder, from the Renaissance and Enlightenment to Hegel's philosophy of history. It is not a matter of passing value judgments, but trying to comprehend a cyclical view of history. Culture is not a mere ornament to development, it is more than mere folklore: it is a key vectorial force. Development has to be integrated and integral. Technology is not neutral and must be attuned to cultural traditions if it is not to destroy the nation's cultural identity and, ultimately, the institutions upon which the state rests. Technological homogenization poses a menace to the cultural diversity that has evolved over the course of history; it subjects every sphere of life to a standardization and uniformization that will jeopardize the continued existence of humanity.

As Ernest Gellner put it so aptly on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Royal Anthropological Institute in London: where political scientists and economists cease to make any headway in their analyses, it is up to anthropologists to find answers to the pressing problems. Needless to say, this presupposes that anthropologists study all humankind and not just “other cultures”. Modernity is now a global phenomenon, there are no niches left; consequently, anthropologists must no longer withdraw to the exotic realm of “backwards third- and fourth-world cultures”. 4. Interculturality as a Peace-keeping Tool of *realpolitik*

What ensues, then, from this emphasis on the concept of culture for policy-making in the global civilization of the future? What lessons drawn from evolutionism, which regards man as a cultural being, can be applied to politics and economics? According to present-day science, man can only be understood in terms of a coevolution of nature and nurture, which turns up a paradox: culture develops from human action at the same time that human action develops from culture. Our genes lay down epigenetic rules that determine our mental capacity for perception and channel the acquisition of culture. In contrast to the purely biological mutations, the dawn of the cultural history of man as an expression of symbolic behavior, sophisticated language, technological innovation and interchange between communities dates back to between 20,000 and 25,000 years ago, when an accelerated change occurred in the course of evolution and the losses and gains of the High Paleolithic Age were consolidated. That was a period of swift diffusion, rapid innovation, great artistic achievement; the cultural factor gave new impetus to the purely genetic evolution.

What can be concluded from this analytic perspective in terms of re-defining cultural relations in the global civilization of the 21st century? Above all: It is crucial for dialogue to take place with cultures and with religions, before we forge political alliances and embark on economic cooperation. That making peace would hinge on such a dialogue was foretold by farsighted analysts from Georges Dumezil and Claude Levi-Strauss to the economist Amartya Sen.

Clearly, this dialogue is now threatened more than ever, and the West will have to engage, since its claim to a sole determination is no longer tenable. Intercultural, or better yet, *in-tracultural* dialogue will serve as a metaphor for a future existence of *realpolitik*. Hence, now and in future we should talk about a “multiverse” of cultures. It is absolutely essential to give thought to the relations between cultures -if the new global order is to be built on deep and durable foundations instead of remaining suspended in the virtual space of strategic/military design with its dubious justification. This will require an egalitarian broadening of the concepts of rationality and awareness. A balance based solely on military strategy will not suffice to keep the peace in the long run. Though they are members of states, people are also, above all, members of cultures and religions on their long passage through evolutionary history. And here lie the underpinnings of any long-term solution.

One thing is already clear: the rigid, material, economic globalization has by no means brought about the peaceful unification of the human race, as we were led to believe, but an alarming uniformization. We need to take other approaches. A culture is universal not according to its absolutist claims, but according to its openness with respect to the rest of the

world. One's own culture is always defined in terms of other cultures; the other is always a self too. We are currently experiencing a simultaneous presence of all the cultures and nations in the world on a scale unprecedented in the history of the human race. This must be taken into account in the global order. The world is now characterized, in a manner hitherto unknown, by intercultural growth, which demands a high degree of adaptability. Even contradictory cultural and religious characteristics have to be united in order to avoid clashes; we must constantly seek the complement that will make for an integral whole. Common aspects must be found between the world's cultures and religions to help mediate between them. The global civilization of the 21st century must not be dogmatic, but conceived as an ongoing dialogue, not centralistic, but intercultural in every sphere of life.

In the final analysis, the global civilization of the future will hinge on the relationship between unity and diversity. That civilization will be an ordered whole with various component parts: the product of historical diversification to be kept in balance by means of integration. This balance is now at risk, for we have over 180 countries in the United Nations, but several thousand different cultural and religious traditions, which therefore need not be congruent with the countries. On the threshold of the 21st century, we face the challenge of a global interculturality hitherto unknown in human history. The internationalism of the world economy can only be successful in the long run if we come to grips with the plurality of cultures and historical worlds in the "absolute present" - which is no longer concentrated in one place, but in one time that entwines all of us.

The next century will show whether we can cope with this task politically, whether we can put into practice the realization that cultures can only develop their individuality through an ongoing dialogue with other cultures. An initial sketch of this interculturality could prove a useful tool of realpolitik for peace-keeping and, ultimately, even the *conditio sine qua non* for the survival of the human race. Dialogue between religions and between cultures is not a new phenomenon in the universal historical process, nor is the relation between technology and culture. Yet both will come to a head in the global civilization of the new century with an inexorable political urgency - in every part of the world that is of geo-strategical importance.

The history of human evolution allows us to look forward to a viable future, because behind all religions and cultures lies a human unity.