Culture, Globalisation and International Relations [1]

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Introduction

It is often overlooked in politics that cultures consist of human beings, and that the phenomena of culture are effects of human behaviour. Globalisation as a global cultural change, resulting from cultural syntheses, cannot be understood without taking into account the psychological mechanisms that determine human cognitions, motivations and decisions.

Cultural identity is a crucial factor within the processes of globalisation. Cultural change is the collective change of behaviour. But this can only take place when the individuals of the social system are changing their cultural identity. That identity, or self-definition, is constituted by the way a person presents him- or herself within a cultural context.

When people of different cultural backgrounds come together, mutuality and reciprocity are impaired by the effects of cultural dominance. The dominated adopt cultural elements and behaviour patterns of the dominant, rather than vice versa. It is especially the style of bodily appearance by which persons define their cultural identity. Therefore, this is the core mechanism that has to be understood when we speak about culture and globalisation. When cultural change leads to destabilisation, effective intervention should tackle this mechanism. But this is complicated by the fact that the representatives of the dominant culture, who would be responsible for such an intervention, are very much committed to their habitual behaviour patterns, which they would have to abandon to adapt to the other culture, in order not to influence it in a destabilising way.

This article presents a functional model of culture and of the mechanisms of globalisation.

Globalisation as cultural change

In the process of globalisation, an individual's role, whether he or she is actively taking part in or rather exposed to the processes, is determined by his or her position

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[1] Based on the author's article "Globalisation and Indigenous Identity",
   Psychopathologie africaine, 2005, 33, 1, 33-47.

within the global game of cultures. By defining their identity, individuals make statements about their affiliation to a social context. Many of these memberships have become uncertain, since the future of whole cultural groups has become uncertain through globalisation. We as a part of the industrial culture are not so much affected by this, as are those who are exposed to the bias of dominance. Especially in the Third World, changes are extreme. Cultures that have been stable for millennia are destabilised by the inclusion into the global culture and often disintegrate. Families break up. Men are being lured away as cheap workers, but the wages are so low that they cannot even return. Women line the streets as prostitutes – those new streets, which open up the countries and ever-new infrastructure, those streets, which are the precondition for embracing the people into the globalisation. If the children are not exploited as labour, they can be happy if missionaries pick them up as street children. Unfortunately, these are no exaggerations. Nor are these some rare, extreme situations. Rather, those fates can be found by the millions in the Third World.

Shouldn't we pay attention to what is happening in the slums and favelas? We need to understand the mechanisms behind those problems to be able to intervene effectively. It might be useful to take a look at recent cultural theory, with its emphasis both on the information and the sign aspects. Cultures are data storages. The approach by Maurice Halbwachs who worked on the collective memory in the 1920s was extended by Jan Assmann in 1992 to the concept of cultural memory, which also considers the extra-corporal storage of knowledge in objects. Thus, cultures are sign inventories at the same time. A sign is a sign if there is an attribution of meaning to it. Any use of a sign is an act of communication towards those who perceive that.

It was G. H. Mead (1934) who pointed out that the individual perceives a social group as a prototypical mass. According to Mead, the generalized other exerts a controlling and conforming function on the individual. When people from different cultures encounter each other, they realise the respective other's patterns of action and symbol systems. These culturally specific elements define the individuals' memberships. Quite different things such as language, artefacts or the design of the body all have a common function of defining membership. The perception then triggers cognitive processes, which can either remain without effect on future behaviour or bring about radical changes of the behaviour.

Culture-context relations

The greater the cultural differences are of those who encounter each other, the greater are the possible effects resulting from the intercultural encounter. We are facing the problem that the process of globalisation is determined predominantly by one side: The industrial culture's behaviour modelling leads to the deletion of specific knowledge of other cultures and of context-relevant behaviour patterns of those concerned. Depending on the criteria, it is estimated that between 2.000[2] and 6.000[3]

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[2] This number by the Worldwatch Institute, Washington; cf. *Claudia Biehahn: „Mit jedem Volk stirbt Wissen". Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt,* 1.1.1993. An article for the Year of Indigenous Peoples as declared by the UNO.

cultures are presently prone to be extinct by the global culture. The dangers resulting from that loss are far-reaching. Cultural "software", i.e. cognitive patterns and the respective behaviour, can be incompatible with a new context to where they have been transferred. If existing cultural elements are being exchanged against imported ones, social systems, which had been stable up to then, can be destabilised. There is a direct connection between pauperisation and the transfer of cognitive patterns, of behaviour and symbol systems from the First World. While striving for improvement, destabilisation is often even accelerated. We have to consider a large number of problems resulting from that behaviour modification: Giving up the traditional use of the environment leads to the loss of species and to erosion, thus worsening the supply and contributing to the global climate change. Some UN organisations have pointed to these interdependencies. E.g. Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, said in an urgent appeal regarding the dangers of globalisation:

> *"The freeing up of markets around the world may well be the key to economic growth in rich and poor countries alike. But this must not happen at the expense of the thousands of indigenous cultures and their traditions."*
> *"Indigenous peoples not only have a right to preserve their way of life. But they also hold vital knowledge on the animals and plants with which they live. Enshrined in their cultures and customs are also secrets of how to manage habitats and the land in environmentally friendly, sustainable, ways (…) If these cultures disappear they and their intimate relationship with nature will be lost forever. We must do all we can to protect these people. If they disappear the world will be a poorer place"* (UNEP news release, Nairobi, 8. Feb. 2001).

Words like "culturally friendly" or "sustainable" are fashionable since a number of years. But there is substantial need for actually translating these concepts into action. Those who work in intercultural contexts, affecting those fragile systems, need to know techniques of minimally invasive field encounter and guidance how to do rescue work, how to restabilise social systems, which have been damaged already, as well as their contexts.

By classifying cultural elements, we can avoid the problematic and conflict-prone dilemma of a supposed forced choice between isolation and integrative incorporation. With the restriction on the relevant signs the intellectual exchange is left untouched, be it of conceptual, scientific, or religious kind. This is not only in concord with the international convention on the Freedom of Information (cf. United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information, 1948), but it also gives the individual the chance of conscious decision.

A recent approach of cognitive social psychology, which is relevant for the self-definition by means of cultural elements, is the Theory of Symbolic Self Completion by Wicklund & Gollwitzer. People feel obliged to identity goals, but at the same time, they realise that they reach those goals only partially. They try to bridge the gap between claim and reality with the help of symbols. Clothing and other elements of designing and veiling the body (and thus presenting and hiding it at the same time), rhetoric and behaviour patterns can be used for compensating the perceived

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[3] Taking the culturally specific language's chance of surviving the 21st century as a criterion, 5.000 to 6.000 cultures are regarded as seriously endangered (Lehmann 1993).

incompleteness. Exactly this mechanism can be found in the superimposition of different social systems, be it in the bias between North and South or between West and East. The cultural contrast, however, is most severe between the industrial culture and indigenous cultures. Those concerned are being confronted with an extreme supposed incompleteness of themselves, which they try to compensate by adaptation to the behaviour of the superior by the use of clothing, objects, nutrition, and language.

Modelling cultural synthesis

Now let us ask retrospectively how our industrial culture has obtained its sign inventory with its respective information. We can find that historically, this accumulation results from the syntheses of many predecessor cultures. First, there are archaic cultures, and the successive interconnection yields cultures with higher degrees of synthesis. Interconnection generally results from superimposition caused by migration or mobility. Single cultural elements can often be traced back along their historical way to one of the original cultures. The number of cultures decreases exponentially during the syntheses' processes. Starting with n cultures at time t_1, which go into synthesis two by two, their number will, after passing through synthesis, at time t_2 be only half as great, etc. (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1.: *Successive syntheses of cultures*

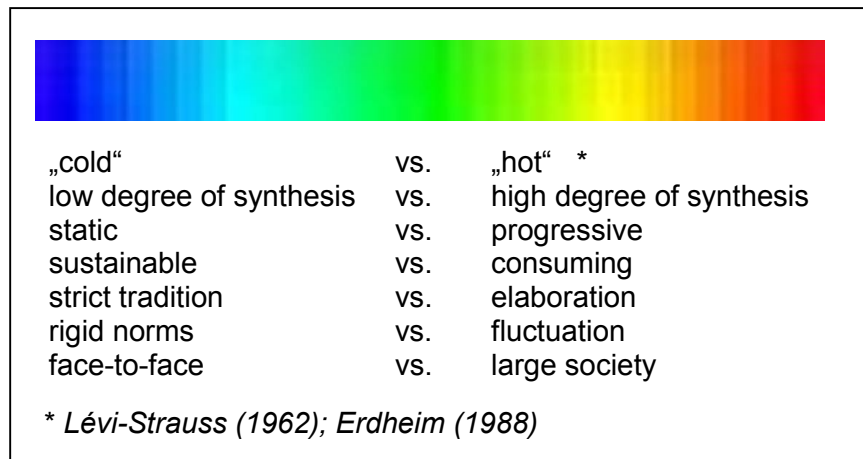t_1 t_2 t_3 t_4 t_5 t_6
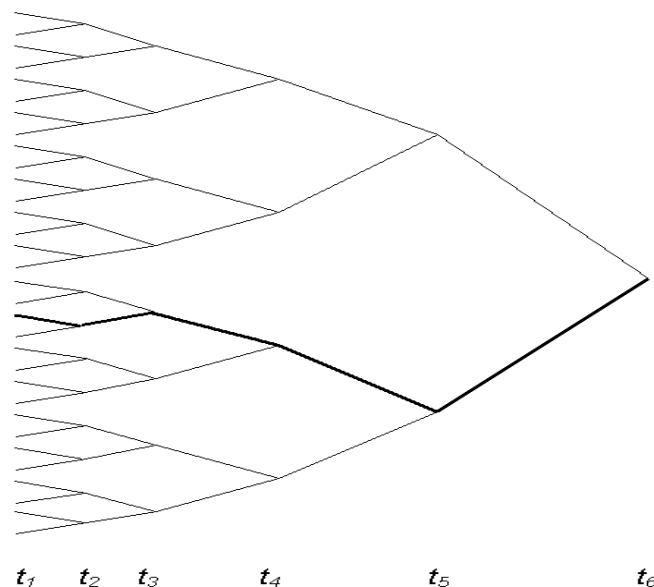
However, these interconnections do not lead to a mere accumulation of cultural elements or of cultural information; rather, they lead to discarding processes. In the storage of the resulting world's standard culture, there are only those cultural elements that have "survived" the various steps of synthesis. In other words: the progressive cultural change leads to a global culture that has just a fraction of the information originally available within the system "humanity".

Cultures with a higher degree of synthesis are quite different from cultures with a lower degree of synthesis. In the Psychoanalysis of Culture (Erdheim 1988) as well

as in Structural Anthropology (Lévi-Strauss 1973, 1967, 1975), societies are positioned within a continuum from "cold" to "hot" whereby archaic culture represents the cold, and the elaborated, "progressive" culture the hot aggregate state (Fig. 2). Cold, archaic cultures can be very stable, as long as there are no interferences from outside. They use their environment in a sustainable way, they are characterised by rigid, unquestioned standards, whereas in advanced states of culture, there is pluralistic uncertainty, which needs conventions in order to clarify the norms for the situations concerned.

Fig. 2.: *Spectrum of cultures*

„cold"	vs.	„hot" *
low degree of synthesis	vs.	high degree of synthesis
static	vs.	progressive
sustainable	vs.	consuming
strict tradition	vs.	elaboration
rigid norms	vs.	fluctuation
face-to-face	vs.	large society

* Lévi-Strauss (1962); Erdheim (1988)

Cultures, which have been heated up by synthesis are characterised by progress and functioning, they strive for expansion and for incorporating others. In the course of syntheses, a striking feature is the loss of information, which does not only concern culturally specific knowledge, but also, with regard to animal and plant species, genetic information.
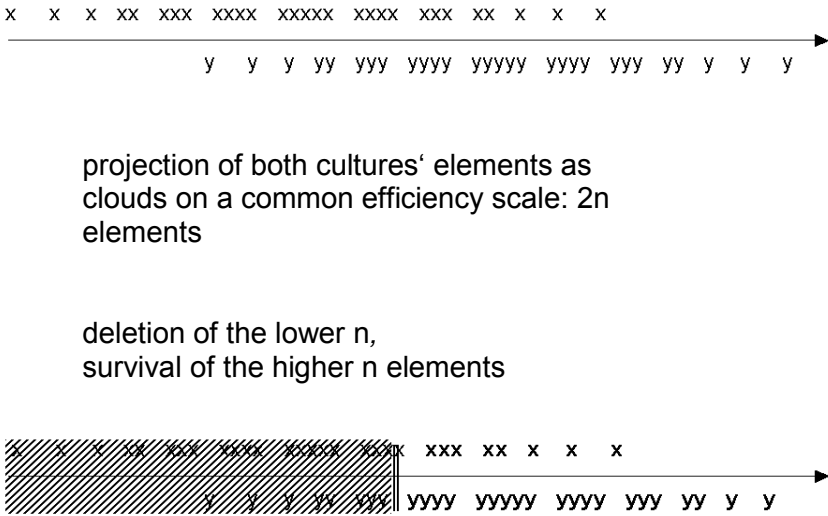
Fig. 3.: *Equivalence classes*
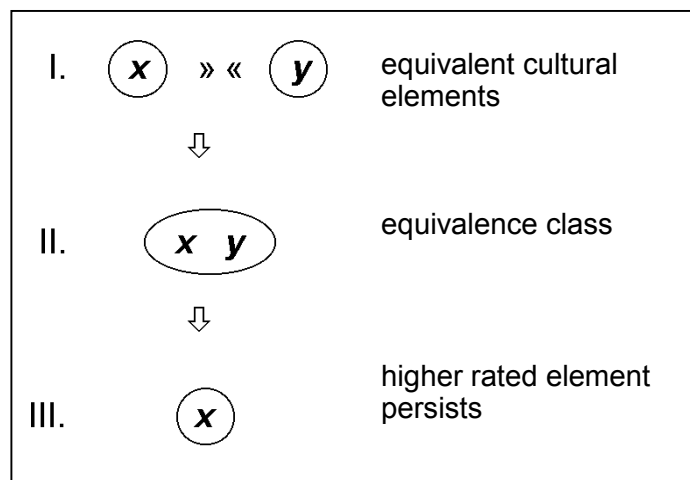
Now, let us have a closer look at the processes of deletion, which take place in the course of synthesis. In so-called equivalence classes, equivalent elements of the

cultures participating in the synthesis are being evaluated by the individuals taking part in the synthesis. More effective cultural elements are adhered to while less effective ones are rejected (Fig. 3). Two basic aspects are evident: information loss on the one hand, information increase on the other hand. Which of these aspects has priority for the individuals concerned, or is perceived by them at all, is relative and depends on their point of view. The apparent progress results from ever-new combinations of the elements of knowledge available. The experience of creating new things yields a self-dynamic process in which progress then becomes a maxim. But the fewer elements are available, the fewer combinations are possible. Only for a transitional period does synthesis lead to a polysystemic situation with the information units contributed by the cultures concerned being available in different cognitive stratification (Even-Zohar (1990).

Usually, the merging cultures are of different degrees of synthesis and therefore, they are concerned to different extents by the deletion of cultural elements caused by the transfer of elements from the respective other culture. Even if there is only a small difference, one culture loses more of its own elements than it receives others; the reverse is true for the other culture. Indigenous cultures are exposed extremely to the industrial culture: The inferior have nothing to oppose the superior, and consequently, in the course of synthesis, their inventory of cultural elements with its respective information is deleted more or less completely and replaced by the externally induced equivalences.

Fig. 4.: *Projection of cultural elements*

x   x   x xx xxx xxxx xxxxx xxxx xxx xx x   x   x

        y   y   y yy yyy yyyy yyyyy yyyy yyy yy y   y   y

projection of both cultures' elements as
clouds on a common efficiency scale: 2n
elements

deletion of the lower n,
survival of the higher n elements

xxx xx x   x   x
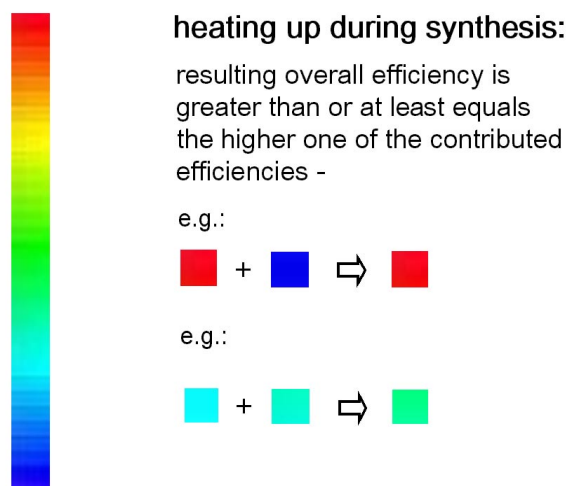
yyyy yyyyy yyyy yyy yy y   y

So, cultural dominance that one culture exerts over another is a function of the relation of both overall efficiencies. It has to be pointed out that the efficiency both of single cultural elements and of the generalised overall attribution is not an objective measure, but a cognitive attribution. Evaluations are made by individuals with reference to the actual situation. Principally, the mechanisms are the same in different constellations, be it with regard to European regional cultures or to the West-to-East bias; yet, in the extreme situations of the North-to-South bias, the mechanism become especially evident. Within the bias, a semi-permeability of cultural borders can be found: A flood of cultural elements pours from the dominant

culture on the dominated. Behaviour patters, which originate from Europe, have been established in Africa, Asia, the Pacific region – but not the other way round. Only very few cultural elements are transferred against the main flow direction, they are taken over by the culture of dominance only singularly, if an advantage can be expected. These very different transfer processes can be labelled as "automatic" vs. "controlled" with reference to a concept of perception research (Shiffrin & Schneider 1977).

As a result from these mechanisms, a culture resulting from manifold syntheses, which is dominant (relative to other cultures) has very effective strategies at hand for most scopes of life. Due to such superiorities, the dominant culture is overestimated in a generalised way, so that even unadvantageous elements of it are accepted uncritically by the other cultures. Because of this generalisation, hardly any cognitive and behaviour patterns of those cultures that are superimposed by the dominant culture are accepted during the synthesis process. The choice of the elements is influenced by the additional dimension of "prestige" in the sense of a Gestalt effect.[4] As the individual tries to reduce the dissonant feeling of being inferior by means of Symbolic Self Completion, the processes are accelerated even more.

In the course of synthesis, the effects of dominance lead to further heating-up. The culture, which had the greater overall efficiency when entering into synthesis, can now increase it even further. Cultural dominance is characterised by the asymmetrical induction of norms. The spreading of the world's standard culture, originating from Europe, is especially manifest in clothing: in the capitals of the world, there is the industrial culture's ideal of designing the body. Tribal people, who don't respect the rules of the modern times, run the risk of being arrested even in the towns of their "own" country for causing public offence; if they get off lightly, they are derided for being "backward".

Fig. 5.: *Heating up during synthesis*

heating up during synthesis:

resulting overall efficiency is greater than or at least equals the higher one of the contributed efficiencies -
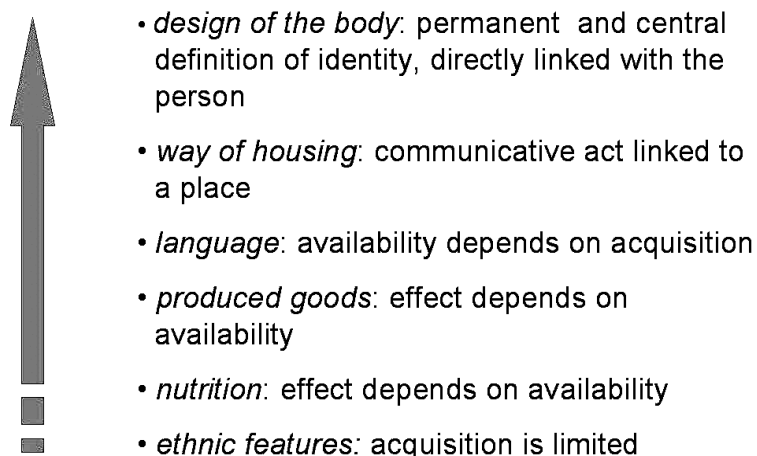
e.g.:

e.g.:

Persons from the Third World usually adapt the style of their visual appearance to the cultural context when they are in the First World. But when people from the

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[4] The negative counterpart of prestige within this dimension is the fear of rejection, which comes into play in those cases where the dominated can't see any chance to enter into the dominant culture, like in the Indian caste system.

industrial culture come to non-industrialised societies, they instantly introduce clothing and money, thus smoothing the way for the final colonisation. Whereas the adaptation of those who, in the bias of dominance, are inferior, is taken for granted, the non-adaptation of the superior to the host culture is perceived as just a normal matter of course, although the dominant person is, so to speak, an alien element, who, as a representative of dominance, communicates valuations with his or her behaviour. As we have found out in our field studies (e.g. with the Punan on Borneo), the inferior often adapt to the dominant culture with regard to the presentation of themselves immediately before an encounter – as soon as they notice that strangers are approaching. The dominant individuals, in turn, due to personal problems with the body concept, seize every opportunity - consciously or not - and use various excuses in order not to adapt their appearance to the culturally specific appearance, i.e. not to deviate from their habitual behaviour pattern. The influence of one's own presence on the visited people is ignored, and it is not even taken into consideration to adapt to the host culture in terms of visual appearance, although that would be a useful contribution to its *re*-stabilisation.

Since visual self-presentation is a communicative act that defines membership, it is a central momentum for human beings to constitute their cultural identity. This aspect helps us to understand why the dominant's refusal of adaptation is directly linked to the destabilisation of other cultures: The individual exposed to the dominance consequently exchanges his or her previous identity against the questionable membership in the global culture. When people define their membership through the use of signs, they do so before themselves, as well as before others. A change of cultural identity is always also a take-over of signs, because the signs of membership establish the individual's identity. However, cultural elements have quite different functions in that respect:

Fig. 6.: *Scalable relevance of cultural elements*

- *design of the body*: permanent and central definition of identity, directly linked with the person

- *way of housing*: communicative act linked to a place

- *language*: availability depends on acquisition

- *produced goods*: effect depends on availability

- *nutrition*: effect depends on availability

- *ethnic features:* acquisition is limited

Some of the externally induced cultural elements can exert a strong influence on the stability of a social system, while others hardly have any influence. The various sign types can be rank-scaled according to their relevance for identity. By replacing traditional cultural elements by external ones, the individual turns away from his or her previous culture, turning to the other culture. This is the more definitely so, the more definite the statement of membership is mediated by the respective signs. The

closer the signs are connected with the human being, the more relevant they are for this person's membership. This is most clearly the case with regard to how the self – represented by the body – is presented, i.e. the representation is manifest in design of the body, especially in the fact if, to which extend and how it is hidden or veiled. Therefore, the taking over of clothing is not only an individual's statement about how he or she wants to be seen; rather, the decision for the take-over even implies a comparative valuation of the respective cultures.

Motivational effects

The consequences resulting from theory with regard to group commitment, identity and decision behaviour have been confirmed in laboratory research (e.g. Gollwitzer 1986; Kiesler & Corbin 1965; Wicklund & Gollwitzer 1982) as well as in field studies (Groh 1989, 1992, 1997, 2002b).

- If there is a strong bias of dominance, behaviour is influenced according to this bias.

- Perceptions and attributions result in a generalising valuation in the sense of a Gestalt effect: The culture, which is perceived as more efficient, seems to be generally more attractive.

- Towards members of less elaborated cultures, a person from the industrial culture has the function of a role model – no matter if he or she wishes so or not.

- By taking over symbols of membership, the dominated individual changes his or her self-definition towards the culture of dominance, thus deleting previous cognitive and behaviour patterns.

However, the dominant are able to counteract that destabilisation. Being role models, they can just as well communicate appreciation of the host culture by the use of cultural elements, i.e. by not sending the signs of dominance during the encounter, but rather demonstrate respect by using the indigenous visual signs, thus revalorising the indigenous culture.

Since the roles and the options of acting are distributed quite asymmetrically, it is the dominant visitor who has to act responsibly by not importing destructive signs. If the visitor uses signs that are rated below the actual value on the elaboration scale, i.e. traditional cultural elements from the time previous to the globalising influence, then this already is some rescue work as it opposes the cultural loss. Within the, unfortunately, common destructive form of field-encounter, the (dominant) culture A influences the (inferior) culture B. Thereby, a transferred cultural element a deletes and replaces the equivalent element b. Rescue work would be as follows: When visiting culture B which, usually, is affected already, the dominant people from culture A use their model function. By again using the original element b of the inferior culture they replace the incompatible element a by the original element b (Fig. 7). As signs are the more relevant for identity definition the closer they are to the self, the appearance of the body has priority for counteracting the destabilising symbolic self

completion and for doing rescue work during field encounters with those who are the inferior ones within the bias of dominance.

Fig. 7.: Induction vs. rescue work

deletion	**vs.**	**rescue work**
A »»» B		A »»» B
a > b̸a		b > b̸b
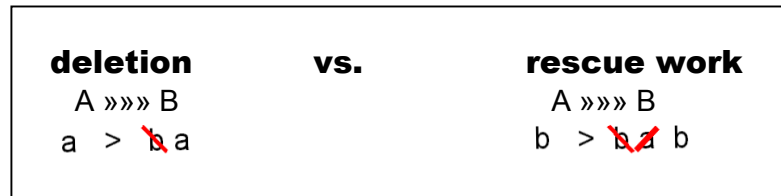
Our participating field research among different groups such as the Punan on Borneo, the Bambuti in the Eastern Congo basin, the Matakam in Northern Cameroon, the Bassari in Southern Senegal, the Dani on New Guinea and the Somba/Tamberma in Northern Benin/Togo have confirmed that the destabilising effects of visiting an indigenous culture can be counteracted by people from the industrial culture if they use indigenous cultural elements, and this, in the first place, with regard to the membership-defining design of the body.

Counteracting the processes of destabilisation meets less with technical problems but rather with personal problems of the dominant. With regard to the cultural continuum, it is also evident that covering the body is a graduator of the progressive change from the archaic to the elaborated state. Within our culture the relation to the human body is, meanwhile, significantly disturbed. In experimental studies, the respective problems have become evident with regard to the subjects' own (clothed vs. nude) body (Markee et al. 1990; LaBat & DeLong 1990). But especially by exporting taboos, cultures are fundamentally being destroyed. Here, the taboo of the female breast as described by Eric Hobsbawm (1978) is extremely relevant. In the every-day context of archaic societies, the female breast plays an emotionally stabilising role as a non-sexual cognitive element. The induction of the taboo triggers a psychological process of destabilising these cultures.

Fig. 8.: *Transference and counter-transference*
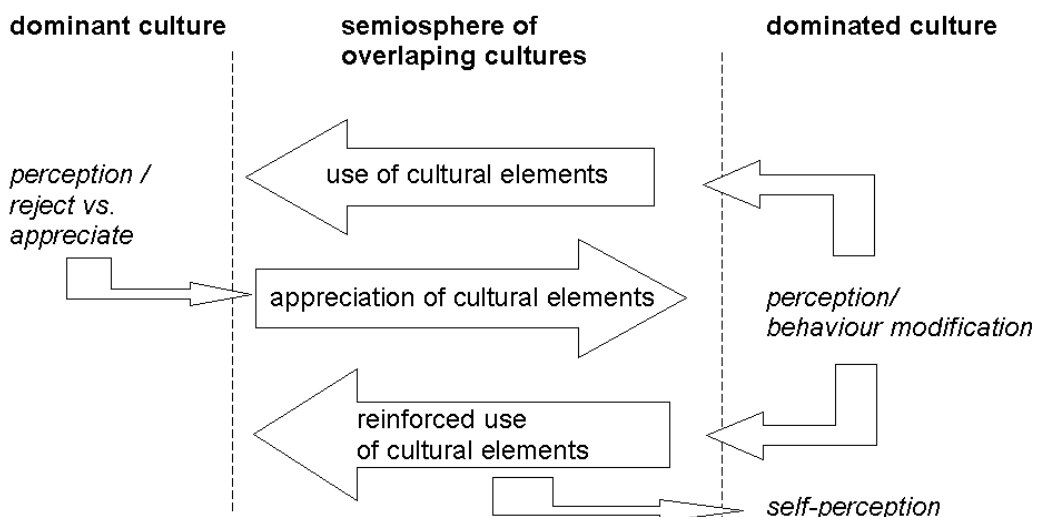
Special perils arise from transference and counter-transference: first, a taboo is transferred from A to B; as soon as it is practised by B, A notices this, thereby receiving further reinforcement of practising the taboo (Fig. 8). In this way, through the use of signs, the cognitions of the participants are changed in a reciprocal and increasing way. Once the new taboo is established, it unfolds its systemic, cognitive and motivational effects.

The personal problems of the dominant ones can easily be described in terms of cognitive dissonance. Taking responsibility is an effort that is not justified by the personal advantages expected. Being confronted with the issue of transcultural dominance, the dominant often use strategies of dissonance reduction, which, with minimal effort, promise maximum results. If evasion is not possible, arguments will be used. With regard to the question of rescue work, e.g., there is a typical tenor:
WE ADMIT THAT OUR CULTURE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF OTHER CULTURES. BUT NOW WE KEEP OUT OF IT.
We all know these statements: "We can't turn back time" – "You can't stop progress" – "It is too late, anyway". But how about those cultures that have not been destroyed yet? There is also a popular excuse arguing that too much has been destroyed already, and in order to avoid additional errors one would better not do anything at all. Another strategy is to ignore the constellation of dominance and to assert that one would not interfere in order to respect the independence of those concerned and to leave responsibility upon them. Downward Comparison (Montada, 1991), Diffusion of Responsibility (Latané & Darley, 1969; Bierhoff, 1980, 1990), and Denial are among the frequently used strategies of avoidance. When adaptation is rejected because it was "faked", because one didn't want to "give up one's personality", "simulate", or "play a role", dialectic aspects are lacking because it is not recognized that it is impossible not to play a role (Watzlawick et al. 1967), and because adaptation of the dominated ones to the dominant culture and, by this, the deletion of their previous cognitive and behaviour patterns, are generally accepted. For the dominant, however, adaptation would only be a temporary matter.

Outlook

The more autonomous a culture is, the more severely the respective individuals are being affected by globalisation. There are thousands of indigenous cultures out there in the world, which are more or less ignored by our industrial culture, as long as they are not part of our system, as they are not part of our network, as they are not available as labour, as they are not available as consumers. But our dominant culture is expanding, it is eating them up. Our culture destabilises other societies, destabilises other people.

In this clash of cultures, individuals are being strongly affected by globalisation, and so is their social structure, and even their environment. As a result, they respond with redefining themselves, giving up their previous identity, thereby accelerating the processes of destruction. We, the representatives of the First World, who actively participate in the globalisation, certainly are responsible to bring about positive changes of the situation.

Intervention in those intercultural fields is now facilitated because of recent top-level political decisions, which make the respecting of indigenous cultures now binding to everyone. In the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), the United Nations have defined the

- Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination,
- Protection of indigenous culture,
- Revitalization of cultural traditions and customs,
- Culturally specific educational system,
- Correct reflection of culture in media and education,
- Land rights,
- Protection of indigenous territories,
- Land use and the mitigation of adverse impact,
- Right to redress and compensation,
- And that indigenous peoples not be separated by borders.

Acting according to this UN declaration requires that the dominant become interculturally competent. Intercultural competence has been described by Taylor (1994, with reference to other authors): In the process of becoming interculturally competent, a person might experience a "culture shock" at first", but after several stages, he or she can reach a state that is characterised by new knowledge, attitudes and capacities, which enable him or her to perform the necessary integrative behaviour. Training people of the dominant culture to become interculturally competent aims at reducing the dominance that people of dominated cultures are exposed to. Intercultural competence of the dominant culture is urgently needed to prevent further destabilisation in the process of globalisation.

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