
Identity Matters in Liquid Globalization - but Identity must not be Understood as Fixed one, but as a Balance

Andreas Herberg-Rothe Ph.D^{*} - Miriam Foerstle^{**}

Abstract

Although we share the warning stated by Francis Fukuyama concerning the tribalization of global politics as well as his reservations about identity politics (Fukuyama 2018), we don't believe that we can neglect the struggles for identity – in contrast to Fukuyama, we do not think we should give up identity as such, but instead need to construct identity differently. Right across the world we find an increasing trend of dissolving identities during the current phase of globalization, which we understand as globalized “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2008). The starting point of our approach is the crisis of the (neo-)liberal world order. In this essay we note two simultaneous developments: first, the “Rise of the non-liberal Rest” (a slight modification of Zakaria, 2008), the rise of the formerly great powers and civilizations which have declined in the wake of European colonization (such as China, India, the Persian Safavid Empire 1501–1736, the Ottoman Empire; the nations on the shore of the northern Pacific like South-Korea, Japan, but also Vietnam, to name just a few) and American hegemony (the USSR); and second, the “Decline of the Rest” (Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018), caused by an obscene level of social inequality

^{*} Andreas Herberg-Rothe is a senior lecturer at the faculty of social and cultural sciences, Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany. He is an international recognized Clausewitz scholar. Based on Clausewitz's concept of a floating balance he is working on the subject of intercultural philosophy and intercivilizational dialogue in order to mitigate conflicts about only seemingly interests (www.herberg-rothe.com)

^{**} Miriam Foerstle was a research assistant at the faculty of social and cultural sciences, Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany. She is now assistant for a member of the parliament of Hesse. The subject of her BA was Daesh and she finished her MA about concepts of the state in Syria.

and the exclusion of large parts of the world's populace from globalization. Both developments are contributing to the crisis of the liberal world order that emerged at the end of the Second World War, and the neo-liberal world order that then arose after the end of the Cold War. In this essay we simply try to elaborate upon the assumptions concerning the decline of the "Rest," caused by obscene inequalities, the disintegration of the social fabric of societies and the general dissolution of traditional identities throughout the world and argue that this development is leading to struggles and fights about identity.

Keywords

Identity, Liquid Globalization, Understood, Balance

I. Globalized Liquid Modernity and Dissolution of Identities

The turmoil concerning Brexit, the Rise of the "Rest" (the fast developing countries), dramatic social inequality, the exclusion of ever larger parts of the populace (the decline of the "Rest", which is excluded from globalization), the rise of radical Salafism, all these developments have contributed to worldwide emotions, that the promises of globalization have been disappointed and been revealed as illusions. When Juergen Habermas, the noted German philosopher judged in 1991 concerning the democratic revolutions in the former states of the Warsaw treaty, that Western modernity would now transcend into the Orient not only with its technical achievements, but also with its emancipatory and democratic principles he was hardly more than the prisoner of the idealism concerning Western modernity. Although being fully aware of the negative impact of two world wars, colonization and its exorbitant violence, Auschwitz and the Cold War, and fighting for his whole life against a repetition of these developments he still believed to be able to rely on a cleaned, purified Western modernity, an approach which his companions, Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, labeled second modernity. Again, in the years starting with the Arab Rebellion or the Arab Spring it seemed as if the conceptions of democracy,

human rights and freedom were transcending from the Western world to the Orient, and its final victory seemed to be plausible – a purified Western modernity would triumph in the end – and Francis Fukuyama wrote his second masterpiece by arguing that at the end of history still stands democracy. But now we are already discussing post-democracy and Parag Khanna is labeling the current phase as devolution – struggles for a local or at least regional identity.

The liberal world order after 1991 was based on capitalism (centered on property as natural and human right), the assumption that worldwide free trade will finally lead to peace (economic globalization) and is accompanied by the orientation towards consumerism as a cultural norm. But consume does neither generate values nor identity. International organizations served the purpose of regulating conflicts between sovereign states and the military, political and economic hegemony of the United States secured this kind of liberal world order, or rather the United States paid the costs (this is the point Trump hangs up), both, out of their own interest or as being the trustee of the whole. This liberal world order now is tattered in fragments, not least because the US under Trump abandoned it willfully, whereas the Europeans are desperately trying to preserve it but don't stand a chance, because they are relying on an idealized past which never existed in the developing and poor countries.

Contrary to the assumptions of the pundits of glo-calization (Robertson and Bauman), the local showed to be not only an amendment of neoliberal globalization, but a counter-movement to the process of globalization (IS, Trump, „Buy American“, Brexit, Marine Le Pen, Duterte, Bolsonaro, Salafism, the European radical right, populist movements). In his notes on Nationalism, George Orwell already wrote, that emotion does not always attach itself to a nation. It can attach itself to a church or a class, or it may work in a merely negative sense, against something or other – we can add against anybody, who does not belong to “us”. In short: We against the Rest. But the “Rest” is not far

away anymore, as in neoliberal globalization the regions in Sub-Saharan and Saharan Africa, in southern India, in the MENA-states, but they are within the West (either as excluded sub-proletarians, the precariat, or as refugees). Although being a counter-reaction, the current waves of struggles for local identities and advantages are as a negation bound to neo-liberal globalization, the globalization of liberalism without equality, which we label tribal globalization.

The advent of tribal globalization does not signify the end of globalization, but the end into the illusions into globalization, which nevertheless has its undisputed successes. But there is no way back to an idealized globalization before Trump, Salafism, or an idealized neo-liberal world-order, because these developments were exactly the result of which they are purporting to fight. The exclusion of the “superfluous”, the “Rest”, produced by neo-liberal globalization, the advent of precarious kinds of life and the liquidity of identity throughout the world must be understood as a double one: The “Rest” is excluded from the positive aspects of globalization and people who are belonging to the Rest are the arbitrarily used enemy-image to construct a fixed “We”-identity („We against the Rest”). And this “Rest” comprises roughly two third of the world’s populace. As the neo-liberal globalization has led to such a social acceleration of the transformation of the whole world, people, communities and polities of all kinds are trying to cope with this process by re-inventing age-old static identities, which are so old, that it is supposed that these will outdo even this transformation. Such seemingly fixed identities are: Race, ethnicity, religion, patriarchy, and – perhaps the oldest one, sex and gender (this can explain the terrible rise of violence against women); and of course, identity through the exercise of violence itself, which is reverting the feeling of being totally powerless into being almighty. Especially biological differences are re-actualized, because they seem to be not subject to change.

These seemingly fixed identities are those of the pluperfect, the far distant past, which can be viewed as being free from the failures of the simple past,

and mainly free from the failure of the immediate fathers – as already was typically for the German Nazis. Tribal identity is a perfect construction, because it is transporting the ideal of being absolutely united against everybody who is not belonging – and the question: Do I belong is the most important question in tribal globalization. Whereas tribes throughout the world are vanishing, tribal thinking in terms of “We against the Rest” is flourishing. Such a modern tribe could be based on ethnicity, religion, sex, nation or whatsoever, it is not the content, which characterizes a modern tribe, but having a tribal identity (typically is Trump’s crony capitalism and with relation to the IS, not their ideology is so much counting, but belonging to a previously powerful tribe). With the emergence of tribal globalization, the very understanding of local order and world order is at stake; order wars are arising, when our order or that of others is dissolving (either only in our perception or in reality); our own order is challenged by another concept or and another order is transgressing into our own (the refugee crisis in Europe). The fast developing countries are not immune concerning the accelerated transformation of societies and identities and the task to cope with this development. As the main problem of neo-liberal globalization is the dissolution of identities and the exclusion of ever growing parts of the populace, that of the emerging tribal globalization the re-invention of age-old fixed identities, which is leading to order wars, what might be a solution?

Based on the concept of the floating (Clausewitz) and developing (Hegel) balance and harmony (Confucius), we strongly advocate the position, that the West as well as the East is only able to hold on their order and values, if these are discursively balanced and harmonized by the contribution of all great civilizations of the earth. Although the liberal world had its undisputed advantages like the rise of the newly industrialized nations, the current developments are already indicating its end. To put it to the core: freedom as the basis of the liberal world order is turning into oppression or civil wars

without equality— just in the name of freedom. Whereas in the 20th century the colonized civilizations had to learn to live with the victorious West, in the twenty-first century the civilizations of the earth finally have to learn to live with one another. This task requires a floating balance (Clausewitz) between freedom and equality, a kind of harmony (Confucius: difference with unity and unity with difference) within societies and between states.

We work with the concept of liquid modernity put forward by Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman 2008), but unlike him we highlight conflicting tendencies in the current process of globalization. We therefore concentrate on the return of the ‘local’: local resistance and struggles for local advantages as well as local identity, “devolution,” as Parag Khanna (2014) argues. Contrary to the assumptions of the pundits of glo-calization (Robertson, 1994 and Bauman, 1998), the ‘local’ phenomenon proved to be not simply an amendment, a differentiation, but a counter-movement to the process of globalization (embodied in the rise of Salafism, in “America First”, Brexit, Marine Le Pen, Duterte, the European and American radical right). The consequences are struggles for local and seemingly fixed identities throughout the world, identities, which are prone to violence.

Globalization has not only enhanced connectivity to a remarkable degree (Khanna, 2016) but also injected a sense of fluidity, uncertainty, and even publicity into areas of high politics previously hidden behind a veil of secrecy. At present, we are seeing that the global village is accompanied by the mentality of a villager. Contrary to other approaches, we think that the rise of Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin’s „New Russia“, Salafism and IS, Hindu nationalism, Chinese and American exceptionalism, ethnic cleansing and ethnicity as forms of excluding others are not accidents of world history, but the result and consequence of neo-liberal globalization. We therefore cannot return to an idealized liberal world order as Francis Fukuyama (2018) seems to propose: this is because in the previous world order the Global South was already excluded and the above-mentioned problematic developments are the

direct result of this liberal world order. What we are currently just realizing is that the crisis of the neo-liberal world order is returning from the margins to the center, and this is now leading to the dissolution of the social fabric in Western societies, too.

As neo-liberal globalization has led to such a rapid acceleration of the social transformation of the whole world, traditional identities are increasingly dissolving: the consequences of this are that people, communities and polities of all kinds are trying to cope with this process by re-inventing age-old fixed identities which are so old and deeply rooted that they are supposed to outdo even the accelerated transformation just mentioned. Such seemingly fixed identities are: race, ethnicity, religion, the ideology of exceptionalism in the US as well as in China, white power, patriarchy and, perhaps the oldest ones, sex and gender (this can explain the terrible surge of violence against women); and of course, achieving identity through the exercise of violence itself, because applying violence yourself reverses the feeling of being totally powerless into being almighty.

These only seemingly fixed identities are not actually those of the present or the simple past, but those of the past perfect, the far distant past; and they can be viewed as free from the failures of the simple past, and mainly free from the failure of the immediate fathers – as typified even by the German Nazis, who relied on a supposed mythological identity of the Germanic people and tribes thousands of years ago. Whereas tribes throughout the world are vanishing, tribal thinking in terms of “We against the Rest” or “It’s us versus them” is flourishing. Since the main problem of neo-liberal globalization involves the dissolution of identities and the exclusion of an ever-growing number of the world’s population, we are facing a development which might be labeled as ‘tribalization of global politics’ or ‘tribal globalization’ (see Chua, 2018 and Fukuyama, 2018).

This kind of globalization is releasing millions of young people from the confines of their social environment – depending on the context, these young people may become terrorists, child soldiers, members of violent youth gangs controlling suburbs from Paris to Rio, drug-dealers, minor criminals, freedom-fighters, religious extremists – in all cases they are fighting not only for their mere survival but for an ideology, which we would label not a modern, but a post-modern ideology, such as Salafism.

These ideologies, as different as they seem at first sight, are based on a simple contrast but one which nevertheless explains their success: We against the “Rest”. The dominance of constructivism (in the footsteps of Michel Foucault) and deconstructionism¹ has left a vacuum of ideas which the Right has easily occupied with its ideology (Salafism, White Power, America First, New Russia, far-right Hinduism, ethnic identity and ethnic cleansing and even masculinity, to name just a few examples; see Lilla, 2016). In contrast to modern ideologies, which have always been based on constructing a concrete enemy, post-modern ideologies are based on constructing a ‘we-identity’, in which anybody could be arbitrarily used as an enemy to legitimize otherwise irrational behavior. As these processes are leading to the dissolution of traditional identities and the social fabric of societies, it is essential for the individual and the community to get hold of new we-identities – but as these new identities are based on a friend-enemy construction in the mold of that of Carl Schmitt (Herberg-Rothe and Son, 2018), they are prone to violence.

¹ Deconstructionism is a form of philosophical and literary analysis, derived mainly from work begun in the 1960s by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, that questions the fundamental conceptual distinctions, or “oppositions,” in Western philosophy through a close examination of the language and logic of philosophical and literary texts. In popular usage the term has come to mean a critical dismantling of tradition and traditional modes of thought; Encyclopedia Britannica; URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/deconstruction>; last access 30.9. 2018; for a critique of constructivism and deconstructionism, see Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018.

In the decades to come globalization will not immediately lead to peace and prosperity as its proponents have thought over the last two decades (embodied in the concept of global governance), but to the rise of non-liberal actors and the dissolution of traditional identities throughout the world.

Although we are not a proponent of the neo-liberal world order that has emerged in the last two decades, its crisis might not simply lead to accelerated social change, but also see war and violence on the march. If the assumption that many conflicts in the world are at least accompanied by struggles for identity and recognition is not entirely wrong, we may need to think along the lines of the Chinese scholar Peng Lu (in private communication 2017): “Whereas in the 19th century the Europeans conquered the world, in the 20th century the defeated and colonized people had to learn to live with the victorious West, while now the civilizations on the earth finally need to learn to live with one another.”

The rise of modern Western powers not only accelerated global connectivity, economic growth, scientific progress, military innovations and the slow diffusion of human rights, but also plunged the world into sporadic catastrophes that claimed many victims (examples being colonialism, imperialism, the two World Wars 14-18 and 39-45 and the Cold War). Now, the West itself is in relative decline because of the “rise of the rest,” such as China, India, Russia and some Muslim nations. Globalization has created not just East and West, but multiple Easts, Wests and hybrids. The root of this crisis is a primacy of freedom over equality in the Western values system. According to Oxfam, just eight ultra-wealthy individuals hold as much property as the 3.6 billion who make up the poorest of the world, or 1 per cent of the world has as much wealth as the remaining 99 per cent (Oxfam 2017).

Immanuel Kant, in trying to find out how to restrict excessive freedom without oppression, proposed that one’s freedom only be restricted by the freedom of others – so if freedom is only restricted by freedom, there is no

oppression at all (Kant, 1797). But times have changed. John Locke, a godfather of liberalism, placed human rights at the center of his observations. But he also placed the unlimited right to property among the pillars of human rights, as he held that property comes about by the exertion of labor, both physical and intellectual, upon natural resources (Locke 1993). This reasoning was sound in his times, but is no longer applicable to the speculative financial capitalism of our current 21st century (Herberg-Rothe and Son, 2018).

The lopsided ownership of unlimited property has deprived an enormous number of people of their liberties and partly enslaved them. Locke was right when he said property is a human right – but only as long as it is based on real labor. However, property that results from speculative casino capitalism may legitimize property rights, but it no longer constitutes a human right. According to the UN, about 795 million of the world's 7.3 billion people, or one in nine, were suffering from chronic undernourishment in 2014-2016 (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, 2018). Our liberty should not only be limited by the liberties of others, as Kant proposed, but also by the equality of others as human beings and their inalienable human rights (Herberg-Rothe and Son, 2018).

The Polish-British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2016) summed this problem up by drawing a comparison to the slogan of the French revolution "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité." According to the advocates of this era, each element could only be realized if all three remained strongly bonded, becoming almost one single body with different organs. The logic was the following: "Liberté could yield Fraternité solely in company with Egalité; cut off that medium/mediating postulate from the triad – and Liberté will most likely lead to inequality, and in effect to division and mutual enmity and strife, instead of unity and solidarity. Only the triad in its entirety is capable of securing a peaceful and thus thriving society, well-integrated and imbued with the spirit of mutual cooperation." (Bauman, 2016, 9) Equality is therefore necessary as a mediating element of this triad, in Bauman's approach. What he is

encompassing is nothing less than a balance between freedom and equality. In order to achieve such a balance we need to revive the discourse about equality. That such a discourse has not evolved thus far in the face of terrible social inequalities can be explained by the hidden primacy of freedom above equality in the Western discourse and as a result of the thinking in categories of “We against the rest” throughout the world (Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018). Even the proponents of equality legitimize a primacy of freedom above equality (Rawls, 1971) or view equality simply as a secondary principle (Waldron, 2017). In order to avoid a rising wave of global tribalism (Amy Chua 2018 and Francis Fukuyama 2018) we need to re-construct the discourse about equality and develop a floating (Clausewitz) and developing (Hegel) balance (Clausewitz) of freedom and equality (Herberg-Rothe and Son, 2018).

II. The Crisis in the Islamic-Arabic World as an Example

The Arabic world is in a state of transformation, and not only since the Arabic Spring attracted a huge media response. Developments responsible for drastic social overthrows are: accelerated social change together with imploding social structures and traditions, increased mobility, progressive urbanization, and a secular intercourse with Islam. Simultaneously, religious authorities in this part of the world have been weakened which has offered new horizons for shaping life there. The revolution in ways of thinking have led to alphabetization and birth control accompanied by an upgraded standing of women. All these factors cause a continuous eroding of familiar customs and ways of life, a moving away from traditional social and cultural contexts (Reissner, 2007: 6-17).

Shocked by all these instances of social overthrow in the last decades, the Arabic-Islamic world lost its orientation. As a result, fundamental and mainly Islamist approaches have been able to gain supporters and to strengthen their

influence, as they deliver putative solutions through simple and unambiguous messages (Reissner, 2007: 21). In a society undergoing a dramatically accelerated modernization process (regardless of the role model upon which it is based), Islamic fundamentalism seemingly serves as an answer to complex and unpredictable problems. These problems cause feelings of helplessness and the desire for orientation toward easily comprehensible merits and norms (Benz, 2011: 13). The so-called Islamic State (IS) has been very effective in using these re-Islamization trends in a very radical manner, and also with an unprecedented level of success. In this way, IS exploits Islam to configure an ideology aimed at creating a motivation for their murderous battle. For most young recruits, life inside the IS fold represents power, strength, status and money (Chulov, 2014). The Islamist fundamentalism helps a divided society to eliminate its inner segmentation, social disintegration and cultural loss of meaning through its traditional world outlooks and its reorientation to values and ideals (Münch, 2001).

In particular, the younger Arabic generation considers itself as a victim or loser as a result of numerous modernization impulses, and has felt at the mercy of these processes for quite some time. Zygmunt Bauman speaks of transition from a “solid” to a “fluid” modernity. Along with this come significant changes, which imply an immense challenge for individual decision-making relating to life. The individual is hereby confronted with old structures that are falling apart or being taken apart, making society increasingly a fragmented entity. At the same time no alternative structure is available that can offer the hitherto level of institutional support or is capable of taking the place of the structure being removed. Hence, all types of relations become unstable and vulnerable and the trust in social relations fades away (Bauman, 2000: 34).

Into the process of progressive liquidation of traditional identities enters IS with a certain form of ambiguousness not present in any area of young Arabs’ lives (Seeßlen, 2015: section II). Since the adjustment process towards the concept of modernity is considered nearly impossible and the promises of

modernity seen as unrealistic and senseless, another alternative for coping with the rapidly changing environment must be found (Münch, 2001). An additional problem exists through heavy tensions between a traditionally, familial and religiously shaped inside world, in contrast to an open, tempting and messy outside. At a certain point in time, these tensions become extremely hard to bear (Seeßlen, 2015: section III).

Charles Taylor emphasizes two notions in the analysis of society: honor and recognition. In pre-modern times social honor and recognition were automatically established in early childhood; these were based simply on the acquisition of the social identity bequeathed by the honor already attributed to the family into which you were born. (Taylor, 1995: 52ff.). Furthermore, so called “we-identities” (Taylor, 1989: 171) guaranteed recognition and affiliation. But the situation in modern societies is different: the individual must acquire their honor and recognition primarily by themselves. At the same time a basic need for societal consideration exists. One’s identity is shaped through a difficult and open-ended interplay and mutual inter-dependency of personal performance and societal consideration (Taylor, 1995: 52ff.). Recognition is thus the result of exchange, and in the course of this human failure is feasible. A given script through societal framing no longer exists, and so risk and insecurity increase significantly. It is not necessarily the need for recognition that is new and therefore simply generated through modernity; it is rather the conditions that are new in this context (Schwarte, 2000: 16).

Violence as an obvious resource for coping with denial of recognition is one of several options which we often neglect to our peril, as Scherr (2004) highlights. He draws a connection between violence and begging for attention, conspicuous behavior at any price and display of personal strength. The atrocities committed by IS, Boko Haram and others inevitably attract widespread media attention and thus afford a feeling of being recognized for the young generation that have become not needed in the context of

globalization and uprooted. Violence can serve as an instrument to satisfy the desire for recognition. By means of a defining themselves through a tendency to violence the individual or group tries to achieve social recognition (Scherr, 2004). This approach has been confirmed by several studies, including by Elias & Scotson (1993) where the consequences of being excluded from career-making in organizations in modern societies were analyzed (a single person or a whole group). Along with this goes the awareness of denied chances of social recognition. A further point regarding violence as an obvious coping resource is the effectiveness of violence for articulating social marginalization. Thus the person committing violence necessarily gains attention, and as a result a compensation of failure through accentuation and display of strength occurs (all references Scherr, 2004: 218-219).

The answer to the fundamental question “Who am I?” is nowadays not an explicit one. In an era of modernization, where processes such as the loss of traditional ways of life, pluralization, individualization and dynamization have a crucial part, the diversity of lifestyles and life-options is growing constantly (Fuhrer and Trautner, 2005: 335). This multiplicity contributes significantly to a process in which identity is no longer a homogenous, compact whole. Ulrich Beck’s risk society (1986) embodies modern experiences of identity in a crisis. Beck differentiates the term modernity. His distinction contains societies and their identities on one side within the »first modernity«, and on the other hand identities within a »reflexive modernity«. Subjects confronted with the first modernity are, despite all individualization and atomization processes, able to produce a collective identity (Beck 1992). The cornerstone is Beck’s “container theory of society” (1999: 49 ff.), which illustrates the fundamental role of social recognition for the construction of identity. In this connection, social recognition is mainly based on and also protected by precise structured social figurations such as family, neighborhood, local groups and networks. Despite increasing detachments and individualization impulses of modern change, it is

nevertheless secured that a protection of individual and social identities can be successful (Keupp, 2008: 41).

On the subject of identity and risk society Beck highlights the following notion: because of cumulative complexity (Beck 1986) there is ever-decreasing orientation for identity shaping. Previous collective identities or binding traditions supporting this process fall away and the individual now faces the challenge of arranging his identity and life independently and autonomously. As a consequence, personal and social life must be balanced and coordinated in a totally different way. This implies a vast difficulty in the post-modern world. The risk society embodies acutely individualized circumstances, in which peoples' biographies become loosened from their predetermined fixings. The individual is responsible for their unrestricted and situational actions and in the end overwhelmed with this task (Schwarte, 2002: 260-261).

The problem is not simply that the Arabic world sees itself confronted with a single modernization process; the difficulty stems rather from the double modernization wave overrunning the whole region and produces a change of unusually high intensity. People in the Arabic world are still in the adjustment process within Beck's first modernity, and at the same time have to deal with the unstoppable globalization of fluid modernity that is literally flooding the entire world. Additional to the situation of radical change and the adjustment process, which have not yet been completed and are still in the first stage, comes a second transformation. Arabic societies have already lost stability through the transition into the first modernity and are now forced to cope with another deep shock. Bauman (2008, p. 52) calls them "latecomers to modernity". Unfortunately and to some degree tragically, they need to find approaches on a local scale for globally caused issues. The prospects of success are at best slight, if not impossible, a fact now clearly proven by events in recent years. The consequences for the individual and their identity are the need

to handle the impact of the first and the second modernity simultaneously and within this confusion the need to build and stabilize their identity.

A supposedly simple back-door solution to this problem represented by radical Islamism, with its numerous mechanisms of assuring power and therefore a kind of identity. Violence, as one of these mechanisms, plays a very important part as an exceptionally influential instrument for the individual. It helps to achieve a new identity and gives herewith primarily purpose to life by belonging to such fanatic and cruel organizations. The primal urge of human beings for recognition contains the key to the cause of violence – this is a basic assumption in the field of socialization research. Erik Erikson holds the view that a young person without a secured identity tends toward extreme intolerance, violence and cruelty in order to gain identity. An unsatisfactory build-up of identity leads to rage and an imminent loss of identity leads to fear – both hold enormously destructive potential (Erikson, 1971: 84). The paradox of all rebellious attempts to create an identity is that conspicuous or provocative behavior of young persons is often just a “request for brotherly recognition” (translated into English; Erikson, 1998: 24).

As Clausewitz already emphasized in his early understanding of war (Herberg-Rothe, 2007), recognition as an equal subject is crucially an essential precondition for conflict resolution in an instrumental-rational way.¹ Due to a feeling of absent recognition, the choice by followers of radical Islamism is a non-instrumental-rational approach. So it is eventually the total self-transgression embodied in the use of excessive force and as part of the inhuman war waged by IS and Boko Haram, to name just two prime examples, which is the chosen way of mostly young men in order to gain recognition.

¹ In the latest academic literature, the significance of recognition is being relativized, because recognition is understood as a purpose-rational tool for conflict resolution (see for example: Daase, 2015). In our concept, discursive recognition is an essential precondition for purpose-rational conflict resolution, but not an autonomous working solution.

III. Meaning of violence?

For radical organizations to gather up individuals with unsecured identities and tie them into a firm and meaningful collective, a striking instrument is required. The experience of collectively and cruelly committed violence is such an instrument that seems to be meaningful for young people with an unstable identity, who are uprooted from their social environment. Personally and directly experienced use of force leaves a lasting, vital and inseparable memory (Bauman, 2000: 40). “Solidarity in crime” (translated into English; *ibid.*) is an extremely attractive method that represents an alternative solution in the above-mentioned issue of attaining absent recognition.

Bill Buford defines the fascination of violence by stating that in the moment where direct force is used no multiplicity and possibility of differing directions of thought exists. Only the present in its absolute form and in the particular moment counts. Violence gives the individual person one of their most powerful experiences, in which they are able to abandon themselves completely (Buford, 1992). Defining violence in this way, a clear delineation can be drawn from the assumption that violence only serves as a means to an end. Buford holds the view, “that there is no cause for the violence” (1992: 234). He simply emphasizes the character of violence as an end in itself, almost as some kind of drug with intoxicating attributes. Through the effective propaganda machine and manipulative action of IS, the recruits on one hand lose their scruples, and on the other get placed into a murderous frenzy. In this way they collectively commit barbarous violence, and in doing so they feel an intensive moment of collective identity.

Belonging to the above-mentioned self-transgression, and with it the choice of a non-instrumental-rational approach, belongs the use of massive and in some instances sickening violence. Ulrich Oevermann sees the meaning of atrocities produced by the use of violence as virtually mocking ethical and moral behavior and conditions. In his thesis he describes how the likelihood for

violence is increased under certain circumstances such as the absence of family ties, positive future prospects, perspectives towards a satisfying life, or most significantly of all, deficits in social recognition. In order to gain more power (possibly also to become equal) violence is used and serves as “a symbol of a monstrous act of indecency” (translated into English; Oevermann, 1998: 111). The only precondition is the fulfillment of a function in terms of a heavily immoral and violating effect. IS recruits try to regain equality, with recognition supplied through position and also to actualize own power.

Furthermore, a radical break with the old, the civilized and the regular takes place. There is probably no greater and more brutal practice of experiencing power than to horrify somebody else (Seeßlen, 2015: section IV). The violence and killing excesses of IS, and the terror that these spread, are their most powerful propaganda tools. Through the publication of propaganda films, execution videos and their brutal action in Iraq and Syria, IS granted huge media attention; it is given a prominent platform for presenting its power, strength and brutality. The major factor here is that the global public looks at IS in horror. It is precisely this, the threat, that can enable powerlessness and inferiority to be defeated and directly transformed into all-mightiness. The recognition of their followers is obviously secured, because the more radical and monstrous the violence the higher the level of recognition (Seeßlen, 2015: section XI).

Within the political sphere, so-called “self-localization” (Schwarte, 2002) might fulfill a functioning role. Here the creation of identity implies the setting of a vision of how one wants the world to be, and in which way and to what extent one wants to be part of it. Egocentric behavior is superseded, and the wish for a satisfactory life collectively lived inside the group comes to the fore (ibid.). However, in the moment when people become rootless and feel socially isolated, they start searching for acceptance and a bond. They eventually find themselves together with like-minded people inside the negatively minded community (Schwarte, 2000).

IS is not necessarily the goal that supporters are ultimately striving for. Any group can satisfy the need for backing and acceptance when a person finds themselves in a phase of life where a deficit of identity and recognition exists. IS has simply been exceptionally successful in collecting and integrating such people who are seeking something in this context. For people left behind in their life and regardless of whether family, the social environment, the state or the whole system bears responsibility for their situation, IS welcomes these people with open arms into its community. The individual people thus receive what they believe had been lost forever in their old life: homeland (Seeßlen, 2015: section VI). A person with an unstable, insecure identity or self-confidence is easily drawn by peer pressure into the hold of group dynamics of a terrorist organization. The group delivers the chance of stability, fellowship, glory and, ultimately, basic recognition (Hamden, 2006: 12). In the end, the individual overcomes their deficit of identity and recognition through a radical but effective method: the abandonment of personal identity and as a consequence of being completely absorbed in a collective substitute identity.

IS not only creates hardness, violence, heroism or warrior status – it additionally offers a homeland and welfare, a feeling of being accepted and appreciated. The »negative freedom« that made the old life inside the fragmented society such an exhausting one is replaced by strict rules, regulating every area of daily life. So the feeling of own accountability is removed and the members lean fully on the IS's guidelines (Seeßlen, 2015, section XIV). Consequently, they achieve a stabilizing substitute identity and at the same time resolve the problem of their poor developed self-worth regulation (Schwarte, 2002: 272). What we have explained with respect to Islamic extremism is similar applicable to other violent groups – for example movements from the far right or the Maras in Central America.

Conclusions

In contrast to the impressive criticism by Francis Fukuyama concerning identity politics, we do not think that identity per se is the cause of the problem and that we just should return to an idealized liberalism as a utopia of the past. Reality is much more complex: the models of liberal political orders of the past were always based on a presupposed identity (the white Americans, the German race, the French nation), which today are subject to specific processes of dissolution in a globalized liquid modernity. Before being able to rely again on liberal procedures we need to tackle the identity problems throughout the world first. In unmistakable contrast to an understanding of identity as fixed and stable, the social sciences have already developed a concept which encompasses a variety of identities which must be balanced with one another. But as identity plays an ever-increasing role in the process of globalization, we cannot, in our discourses and struggles, simply abandon the search for identity – of course, an identity based on a friend-foe contrast is prone to extreme violence. However, we need a discourse on balanced identity, because people through the world are losing their identity: therefore, excluding this concept from the struggle for freedom, equality and emancipation would simply open the discourse up to constructions of seemingly fixed identities in the form of “we against the rest”, whoever “the rest” might be (Herberg-Rothe and Son, 2018).

This concept of a floating (Clausewitz) and developing (Hegel) balance (again Clausewitz; see Herberg-Rothe and Son, 2018) is based on the recognition that identity is inevitably related to personal identities as well as we-identities – but the difference is that there are nevertheless many forms of communication and cooperation transgressing the borderline between ‘we’ and ‘the others’. An example for this perspective is the way in which we should consider IS acolytes. For a sizeable number of IS fighters, the return to a normal civilian life may be impossible by now, given the collaboratively committed amount of violence, crime and especially sexual cruelties. It may be

reasonable to say that there is only one possibility of fighting these uninhibited combatants to the bitter end. Nevertheless, we have to differentiate this struggle from that against the seemingly never-ending replenishment of new fighters who are excluded, not recognized, uprooted and disillusioned in the process of globalized liquid modernity. If we were not to make a differentiation between them and the hard-core IS fighters, we would contribute to a never-ending replenishment of them. To restrict and contain this replenishment, the only possibility seems to be the construction of a discourse of mutual recognition among the great civilizations of the world, here in particular concerning political Islam not as a religion, but as a civilization. Religions are tempted to exclude one another with reference to the absolute, whereas related civilizations enable the integration of the other. Worldwide, we are witnessing the dramatic rise of thinking in categories of “We against the Rest”, whoever the Rest might be. The solution to coping with this development is not the clash of civilizations, as Huntington has prophesied (1996), but in fact a floating (Clausewitz) and progressing (Hegel) balance of the great civilizations of the earth (Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018).

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