

Interethnic Conflict Regulation

A case study at the Dani in West Papua

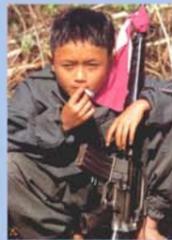


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"Conflicts" as psychological object of investigation can be conceptualized at different levels: intra-personal, inter-personal, intra-structural, inter-structural (Krause, 1998) or on a macro-level of societies (Watson-Gegeo, White, 1990). In any case conflicts are determined by several dimensions, e.g. emotional, procedural, communicative, normative, economic and sometimes "cultural" factors. This study focuses on conflicts between men belonging to different ethnic groups respectively manifest conflicts, which are intensified by a feelings of ethnic affiliation. The current Human Development Report (UNDP, 2000) counts more than thirty armed conflicts worldwide – most of them are not between nations but clashes within the borders of postcolonial states, they are "interethnic". The way how conflicts arise, how they are performed and how they are disentangled/mediated/solved between two or more groups are shaped by cultural patterns.



Little is known about the "ethnic" factor in multicultural conflict constellations.

But since in Germany the *Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ)* sends German peace professionals in developing countries to mediate between subjects of different cultures, the question, which indigenous concepts of conflict regulation exist already there, becomes an issue also of nonacademic interest (Fahrenhorst, 2000).

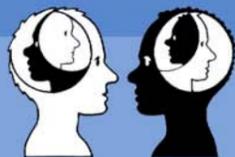
The aim of this study is to find out culture bound patterns of conflict regulation and to understand the dynamic of their processes.

Modern western mediation theory developed a lot of tools and concepts, how to deal with conflicts. But how solve for example Asian traditional clans their conflicts? What is the impact of senior elders as mediators? Which kind of interventions come into force in their cultural setting?

One theoretical background will be the concept of meaning-producing reference-worlds, which works as foundation for the German research-network "*Ethnisch-kulturelle Konflikte, Rechtsextremismus und Gewalt*" (Hallson, 2000).

Beside the literature-based analysis of several current interethnic conflicts (e.g. Hutus-Tutsis, Indonesia-Timorese) and their regulation models (e.g. bigmen, trouble committees, homicide compensations) a case study in West-Papua is carried out.

The local people in the Baliem Valley of Irian Jaya (West Papua) are known in Anthropology as being in permanent warfare with neighboring tribes. One of their "existential themes in life" are conflicts.



Some Questions

- Which procedures, rituals or mechanisms for "conflict-regulation" and "disentangling" are successfully used by this nonliterate folks?
- What happens if something happens?
- Similar to questions concerning the impact factors in psychotherapy or mediation, one key question will be, what is experienced as "helpful" by the local people: Which aspects of the ritual setting? The mediating elders? Which behavior of the contrahents?
- Is there a potential of any transfer of culture-sensitive procedures from the premodern societies to postmodern "peace-professionals" in international contexts?

Method

According to the facts that the frame of this interdisciplinary investigation is anthropologic, the design is explorative and the primary instrument for getting first hand information from tribes in the highland of West Papua will be field research, the method can be labeled more "qualitative" than "hypothesis-testing".

Participant observation is the most well established scientific method in Anthropology to reach a high ecological validity. It will be supplemented by videotaping of key scenarios, which can be analyzed by a second rater later on in Heidelberg.

So the backside of the naturalistic design, the often criticized one-single observer-situation with an obviously smaller reliability, can be encountered.

As a problem oriented research, focussing the collection of specific data to investigate a particular question, narrative-biographic, conflict-centered interviews will be used to acquire sufficient information and understanding, how the conflict regulations are experienced by the locals (recall ethnography).



Dani ...

- is a label for several different tribes in the Baliem Valley
- are subsistence farmers, mostly harvesting sweet potatoes
- are distinguishable by language, physical appearance, dress and social customs from other groups in the settlement area of the highlands (like *Yali* or *Lani*)
- have a polygamous marriage system (which maintains despite missionary pressure)
- perform a lot of customs which astonish western observers (amputation of one joint of woman's finger, when a close relative dies; men wear penis sheaths (*harim*) made of cultivated gourd)
- have different forms of fighting in the ritual phase of warfare (battles and raids)
- are well known for frequently arising conflicts (Heider, 1979)

A preliminary study (April & May 2000)

During a feasibility study in springtime 2000 first data were collected from two international hot spots: East-Timor and Irian Jaya.

While East-Timor would be for many reasons a difficult research-area during the period of the transitional administration of the United Nations (UNTAET), the *Dani* in the Baliem Valley of Irian Jaya could be a highly interesting ethnic group for the intended research of conflicts between contemporary communities.

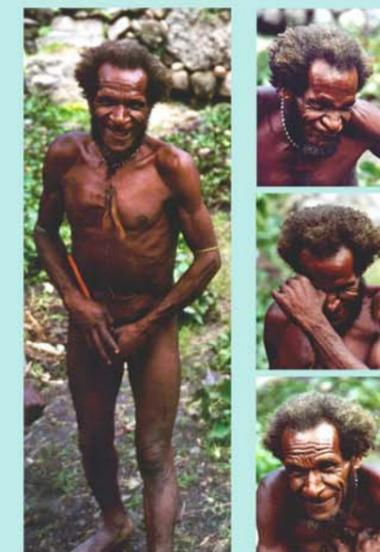


Context of emotion

The actual idea of this research project in the interdisciplinary announced *Graduiertenkolleg* was to investigate the interrelation between culture, life themes and emotion. Unfortunately the financial support of this anthropologic orientated design was stopped in January 2000. The focus shifted from "emotion" to "conflict" – a topic, other colleagues work about simultaneously so that a stimulating discourse emerged.

Since there is probably an emotional charge in every conflict-talk, the investigation strives emotional issues implicitly. The display rules for specific conflict situations could be an interesting supplement for the discussion about the culture-specifics in emotion research.

The pictures show the expression of some "basic emotions" of the Dani in an artificial photo-session. During a long-term fieldwork probably chances occur to record emotions in their natural daily performance.



The current state

The start of fieldwork is planned for winter 2000/2001.

At the moment the author learns a local language, arranges the Indonesian research permit, studies the literature and raises funds for the fieldwork.

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About the collegiate

- bom 1968
- studied Psychology and Social Anthropology at the Universities of Cologne (Germany) and Kathmandu (Nepal)
- worked three years in the German Foundation for International Development (DSE)
- editor of the first Multimedia-CD-Rom for German developmental experts on acculturation, conflict management and cross-cultural negotiations (INTERKULT 1.0)
- part-time Lecturer of Psychology (Arnold-Dannemann-Akademie) and Anthropology (Ethnologisches Institut, Universität Heidelberg)
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