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Midterm Examination: Essay on the Topic of Question 2

Topic: Cultural Terms and the Power of War

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Cultural Terms and the Power of War

Introduction; The following essay deals with several controversies. Is it possible to create some kind of relationship between violence, cultural norms, war and peace considering the contemporary gap between gender equality in some areas of the world and discrimination of women in other parts across the globe? In some way my essay focuses on those three elements Gwyn Prins is talking about in his book “The Heart of War”. Power, conflict and the defense of Human Rights respectively Women’s Rights stress the theoretical framework of the following thoughts (see, G. Prins, *The Heart of War*, p.xxii).

The methodical approach of this essay shall be, to explain first of all the different views of those mentioned elements in International Politics. In addition to this thinking there should be the attempt in the final conclusion to find a specific way to reconcile both views given in the examples of the questions. I try to do that by explaining these different accounts referring to the controversial view on International Politics – namely Realism and Idealism. The thoughts of the realistic view of International Politics underline the reality and therefore can explain the supremacy of manliness and the discrimination of women in many parts of the world. Nonetheless, idealism (the way it should be) seems to be suitable to refer to the ongoing feminism and pressure for gender equality in those countries mostly of the western hemisphere.

The first paragraph discusses the relation between power, war and violence in two perspectives. The second paragraph shows an additional view including cultural matters (role of women in society) also in two perspectives. The last passage of this essay tries to reconcile the two perspectives of the argumentation. The attempt will be to answer the following question: How is it possible to bring together both views (i.e. global perspective and specific issue concerning women’s role in society) in order to avoid the apocalyptic view of a Clash of Civilization as Samuel P. Huntington predicted?

The Power of War and Violence; The research field of International Politics provides several possibilities to analyze the relationship between power, war and violence. Beginning with ancient Greek philosophers and historians like *Thucydides* (Melian Dialogue during Peloponnesian War), or *Machiavelli* in the 16th century and many other thinkers (e.g. Morgenthau 20th century), the realistic view of International Politics is based on power as the decisive measure to cope in an international system of anarchy without any higher institution above the state – level. It all comes down to the survival, self-defense of the states as the only actors in order to maintain a stability that can be best achieved with a system of balance of power. War and violence is justified as soon as it is useful and necessary for the survival of the state.

Idealism (the way it should be) provides a much more optimistic view of world politics. Referring to great thinkers like *Immanuel Kant* in the 18th century and his thoughts on the perpetual peace, contemporary Idealism stresses the need for cooperation and non-state actors. Idealism (i.e. the different parts of it like Liberalism, Institutionalism, Functionalism et cetera) is convinced of the peaceful impact of economic liberalism on world politics because of the creation of wealth through free trade with less national boundaries (Zook, Class: July 9th). Peace according to Idealism requires three elements. First of all there is a need for a civil constitution of every state that should be republican. Apart from that, the right of nations shall be based on a federation of states. The last requirement for peace is the principle of hospitality among the variety of actors in this multipolar approach to world politics (see, Prins, p.121).

The contemporary view on world politics is quite ambivalent. On the one hand there is a War on Terrorism led by the United States that does not fully comply with International Law and that does reveal the United Nations as a superfluous and old - fashioned institution. On the other hand the charter of the United Nations 1945 and the following achievements concerning the issue of Human Rights like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as customary International Law or the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) stress the

existence and the partly success of Idealism in world politics. The last thoughts were necessary to continue with the analysis of the ambiguous promotion of Women's Rights in world politics.

Cultural Terms and their influence on Women's Rights; Starting again with the realistic view, there should be a short case study on Women's Rights in Saudi-Arabia and India. Though beginning to improve women's role in society, the contemporary role of women in the Islamic society of Saudi-Arabia is still frightening. One year ago, a school for girls (strict separation of the sexes) in Mecca (western part of Saudi-Arabia) was on fire. The Islamic Police on duty blocked the emergency exits because of the fact that the majority of the girls had no veils. The emergency service was not allowed to enter the building because of the enforced gender separation by the Islamic Police. 15 Persons were killed and many were wounded (see, annual report on Saudi-Arabia 2002, in, www.amnesty.org). Although Islam condemns the violence against women in many parts of the *Quran*, the tradition respectively its understanding in the mainly authoritarian states of the Islamic World does not allow them to achieve their full potential as free and equal members of society. In other words – referring to Coker – Charles Darwin, the British naturalist of the 19th century, is still present with the conviction that the stronger and manlier race is more likely to succeed in the struggle of survival (see, C. Coker, *Human Warfare*, p. 84). Referring to the widespread assumption, severe discrimination of Women's Rights is restricted to the Islamic World, just look at India with its weak civil society and its regional gender selection that humiliates Women's Rights. It is not worth giving birth to girls. The consequence is drastic if you analyze the composition of the population in some areas in India. 1000 men face 600 women because of such humiliating and discriminating structural violence against women (see, Zook, class: July 21th).

Continuing with the idealistic view of cultural terms one has to emphasize the variety of conventions, covenants and treaties, which form the International Law, the states (who signed and ratified them) have to comply with. Beginning with the Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (both 1976) and the already mentioned Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (last one

ratified by Saudi-Arabia) the fight for gender equality has achieved a global perspective within 50 years. Considering the United States, women are serving in the army. Gender equality is an issue in all parts of society. Though being aware of the ambiguous opinions e.g. relating to the predicted reduction of military effectiveness, existence of sexual harassments and frustration among men (see, Coker, p. 103), a big step towards gender equality has been achieved. It is the consequence of the increasing power of feminism in the 20th century and the decline of masculinity in our post-modern society. *Aristotle* said it and post-modern thinkers tell us, that women in the army change attitude towards war itself. That is why their participation in post-modern times is so important (see, Coker, p. 107). Referring to *Aristotle*, men find it easier to be courageous, women to be moderate (see, Coker, p. 88). To sum up, there is a correlation between gender equality, e.g. involving women in military service and a reduction of violence in the specific society because of the positive and stabilizing benefits for civil society.

Conclusion; In the last few pages I have shown the clash between the way it is and the way it should be, namely Realism versus Idealism (global level) and in the same way discrimination, intolerance versus gender equality (national and local level). How is it possible to reconcile both views as presented in the last few pages? Coker tells the reader, that the planet – according to the subject of *Human Warfare* – is a zoned one (see, Coker, p. 111). Hence the following theses should stress the danger of Huntington's claim of a Clash of Civilization once there will be no harmonizing common sense between both zones of world politics.

During the development towards a global village, cultural terms are getting more important as national boundaries are declining in its importance at the same time. In my opinion cultural values are going to be the defining forces of the 21st century. Coming back to my presented controversy in the view of world politics between Realism and Idealism, there is an ongoing visible convergence between both approaches according to Neo-realism taking into account e.g. non-state actors and Neo-liberalism taking into account e.g. the measure of power as an important force in world politics. In this perspective I do not want to present a new proposal. I fully agree with Prins that

post-modern politics need a common denominator of both perspectives. The combination of both can be achieved by involving maturity and rationality in our thinking (see, Coker, p. 130).

Coming back to the more specific issue of this essay, maturity must be the decisive element. The culture is one of the key elements for the society of the future. There cannot be a unique worldwide cultural unit. Each society or ethnic unit shall have and shall get the opportunity to express its own cultural values. Overall – and this has to be enforced – there has to be a common ground about the way a multipolar global society should exist. The United Nations have to be the decisive force in promoting a minimum but necessary common sense, all ethnic diversities and societies can agree to and must comply with. The acceptance and the real promotion of gender equality, as stated in the CEDAW has to be achieved and enforced with real measures of surveillance. In my opinion, though being aware of the difficult situation of the United Nations and the great obstacles lying in front of us, this development is a necessity without any other options. This may not be achieved within one year. Yet in the long run, the Clash of Civilization or to say it in different words, the results of the zoned planed can be avoided respectively eliminated. Consequently both views as stated in the Introduction can be reconciled. Referring to the examples in the question of this midterm examination, the prisoner of war in the second article would not be morally punished because of the acting female soldier and the need of sexual power – as stated in the first example – is not necessary because of a sustainable development across the globe incorporating real gender equality.

The last thing I would like to stress is the necessary awareness that these aims can be only achieved in the long run. I am convinced that the United Nations will shape the most important role in this process. Each citizen around the world should not underestimate the already existing power of the United Nations.

This essay ends with a citation of *Hegel* (German philosopher of the 18th and 19th century) that should stress the importance of the discussed topic and emphasize the necessity to act:

“History did not simply happen; it was something that was made.” (see, Coker, p. 134)

