Humiliation, Conflict and Public Policy

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Abstract

There are not many systematised discussions on different understandings of the term 'culture'. One of the few is made by the sociolinguist Ben Rampton (unpublished) in a study, which primarily dwells with different perspectives on linguistic diversity in the society. This study ends up with an illuminating table which accounts for four different understandings:

1. Culture as elite canon/standard
2. Culture as sets of values, beliefs and behaviours
3. Culture as reflection of socio-economic relations
4. Culture as the processes and resources involved in situated, dialogical sense-making.

In psychology, one may operate with similar groups of definitions in the sense that culture may be defined in terms of artefacts (Cole 1998), values (Hofstede 1980), socio-economy (Douglas & Wildavsky 1983) and dialogical sense-making (Billig 1997). It is an open question which definition may be the most fruitful when it comes to get a proper understanding of the term 'conflict'.

In my presentation, I will give some arguments for that semiology and dialogical sense-making may represent a fruitful point of departure. By analysing how symbols and understandings were construed during the first minutes after the 9.11-attack, it will be demonstrated how the understanding gradually changed from regarding the event as an accident from the very beginning, to a symbol of deep conflict afterwards.