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Definitions of violence, the ZKE and its critics

Invitation to a dialogue on purposes

1 What purpose is being pursued by the ZKE?

The Istanbul Convention to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence took effect on 1 August 2014. The Convention is the first legally-binding instrument at European level with the objective of protecting victims of violence and ending the impunity of perpetrators. The measures foreseen by the Convention include those in the areas of prevention, advice and support, legal protection and civil and criminal proceedings. All forms of violence are covered, including domestic violence, which affects women to a disproportionate extent. Member states are called upon to apply the Convention to all victims of domestic violence (Article 2).

The ZKE team took up one of the demands of the Istanbul Convention: the work on non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships. For this purpose, an ensemble was presented, comprising three elements. The first element is an intervention programme, whose effectiveness has been verified empirically and which has been adapted for the particular issues at hand. The second element is the development and testing of a questionnaire, which is the prerequisite for the work on the intervention programme. As a third element, the ZKE team has submitted its own definition of violence. The developments are described in the ZKE weblog at

<http://zkewomenprojekt.wordpress.com/>.

Definitions can be developed for different purposes. What purpose is being pursued by the ZKE definition? Programmes to prevent, reduce or end violence often suffer from the fact that their effectiveness cannot be adequately proven. Methods of success control generally contain numerous imponderables. This lack of proof of effectiveness would not carry so much weight if the only negative consequences were simply disappointed expectations and wasted resources. It would, however, be disastrous if it emerged that an instance of violence had been wrongly considered solved without contemplating other alternative interventions. With this disturbing idea in mind, the ZKE composed a questionnaire with which violent action can be measured. The questionnaire was developed for the objective, reliable, valid and economic clarification of the question. It can be used as a success control before and after the intervention programme. This combined use of the intervention programme and the questionnaire requires a definition that must fulfil two conditions. The definition process must be explicit and unambiguous.

2 Dispute with the ZKE

The three elements of the ZKE work have been criticised repeatedly in the context of the Grundtvig study. The critics consider the programme to be inter alia ineffective and inapplicable. They call the questionnaire methodically inadequate and removed from reality. The critics take the definitions by the WHO, the UN and the Istanbul Convention as their ideal and reject the ZKE definition.

The Swedish colleague, Mona Eliasson, wrote to the members of the Grundtvig study on 6 November 2014. The two-page text carries the header “THOUGHTS ON OUR PROJECT”. Mona Eliasson suggests some guidelines for writing a joint concluding report. The author refers to the work by the ZKE team as follows. The abbreviation “DV” stands for “domestic violence”:

“Finally, a comment on the violence-reduction method proposed by our German colleagues. It is probably working well in the contexts for which it was designed. However, it definitely does not when it comes to domestic violence, it may be dangerous. DV rests on in-equality (if we agree on having feminist theory as our common theoretical base) and in such a relationship it is not possible to have conversations like those described. European research and internationally has shown this over and over; a violent man will never listen to his partner. If she has another opinion, he may beat her up! It’s commendable to look for ways of ameliorating damages and hurt, but here we need other methods. Couple-treatment in DV-situations is something for experts, who use it cautiously under very specific conditions so as not to provoke new violence. (See .e.g. S.M. Stith et al. Couples Therapy for Domestic Violence. Finding Safe Solutions. Washington: 2011).”

The author subsequently refers to the study “Violence against women: an EU-wide survey” by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) from 2014:

“P.S. I hope you have all noticed the material provided by FRA on the EU-countries (fra.europa.eu). They have e.g. a useful survey: Violence against women: an EU-wide survey, and lots of other interesting things.”

This is Mona Eliasson’s assessment of the work being carried out by the team in Kiel. To what extent her statement can be understood depends on the definition of violence that she uses. As with other studies on violence, the question of the definition is also a decisive aspect in the Grundtvig project.

3 The development of an explicit and unambiguous definition

The development of an explicit and unambiguous definition can be described by taking a simple example (see Peter Janich: Logisch-pragmatische Propädeutik. Ein Grundkurs im philosophischen Reflektieren. Weilerswist 2001, 124). Let us assume that the word “Scandinavian” must be defined for the purpose of a scientific study. The following enumeration can be conducted: “A Scandinavian is Norwegian or Swedish or Danish or Finnish”. The word “is” in the list can be interpreted as “is defined as” or “is by definition”. “Is” divides the definition process into two parts. The “definiendum”, i.e. the word to be defined, is located to the left of “is”. The “definiens” is on the right hand side: the four items of the enumeration that are intended to determine the word in question.



The words of an explicit and unambiguous definition are characterised by a special feature, which we shall illustrate with an example. Every morning, one of the large passenger ferries from Oslo docks in Kiel Harbour. A motorist who, while stopping at traffic lights precisely at the moment of disembarkation, encounters a large and restless group of people, can say to his passenger: “There are the Norwegians”. Even though people of many different nationalities have travelled on the ferry, at this moment the imprecise term “Norwegian” may be suitable in order to signal to the passenger that the large gathering of people does not indicate an accident requiring the help of the car occupants, but rather the impatient waiting of ferry passengers wishing to cross a busy street. In such a case, “Norwegians” is a colloquial expression that can be completely appropriate at that moment in the situation of the stressed motorist. The purpose determines the choice of word. It is a very different matter when understandable expressions, unconnected to a situation, are required for a scientific study. To avoid such misunderstandings that often occur in everyday speech due to insufficient agreement, rules on using specific words can be introduced to the study. The rules serve to exclude ambiguities and to replace these with situation-invariant clarity. In the (fictional) study on Scandinavians, for example, a rule might be introduced stipulating that the relevant nationality must be documented in each case by a proof of nationality on a verifiable legal basis. Words that are determined precisely by such a standardisation of use are known as “termini”.

Thomas Klare and Peter Kroppe (Verständigung über Alltagsnormen. Der rationale Dialog – das Verfahren einer undogmatischen Rechtfertigung von Verhaltensnormen. Ein Kursprogramm für den Sekundarstufenunterricht. Munich/Vienna/Baltimore 1977) describe a non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships in fourteen rules, the infringement of which is defined as violence. By using the termini of the rational dialogue, the ZKE definition of violence is an explicit and unambiguous definition.

4 The United Nations Declaration of 1993

What kind of definitions are those of the WHO, the UN and the Istanbul Convention, which serve the critics of the ZKE study as ideals? As the three definitions are identical in one decisive aspect, we can examine the UN definition as representative of all three. This definition is cited as a basis in the FRA study referred to by Mona Eliasson in the appendix to her letter:

“[...] the first internationally agreed definition of violence against women was introduced in the 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (Article 1), which states that: “*violence against women*’ means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” (UN, General Assembly, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, A/RES/48/104, 20 December 1993, p. 3.)” (FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights: Violence against women: an EU-wide survey. Main results. Vienna 2014, p.9).

The word “means” divides the definition process into a left-hand and right-hand side. The word “violence” appears both to the left and to the right. This indicates identity between definiens and definiendum. As a word cannot be defined by itself, “violence” has the status of an expression that is not removed from colloquial language. In addition, because the items of the enumeration on the



right-hand side do not represent any context-invariant elements, the UN's 1993 definition of violence represents a description of forms of violence in their everyday, colloquial use.

The FRA study cited by Mona Eliasson provides an example of how ambiguity can impair communication between interlocutors. The expression "physical harm" forms part of the UN definition. One of the questions posed in the FRA study is: "[...] how often has someone [...] pushed you or shoved you?" (see table). Anyone who has experienced an emergency stop in a full city bus might demand a differentiation between violent and non-violent pushing. Answers given on the basis of the colloquial use of the expression "violence" are not clearly comprehensible. Not even a reference to another item on the list in the UN definition can help to answer the question. As the words used are not termini, reference must be made to the next colloquial element, from that to the next, and so on.

Box 2.4: What the survey asked – physical violence
Since you were 15 years old until now/in the past 12 months, how often has someone:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• pushed you or shoved you?• slapped you?• thrown a hard object at you?• grabbed you or pulled your hair?• beaten you with a fist or a hard object, or kicked you?• burned you?• tried to suffocate you or strangle you?• cut or stabbed you, or shot at you?• beaten your head against something?

Table: Questions in the FRA study on physical violence. Source: FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights: Violence against women: an EU-wide survey. Main results. Vienna 2014, p.38.

What are the possibilities and the limitations of the use of the UN definition? Different factors can determine the type and manner of a person's colloquial statements. These can include gender, age and place of residence. Men can make different colloquial statements than women, young people can differ from older people, while people in Germany might express themselves differently to those in Finland, Romania, Sweden and Slovenia. They belong to different living environments, which can be linked to different habits of colloquial speech. The differences can be so large that inhabitants of one part of the country might not even understand those from another part when they speak colloquially.

What possibilities are offered by the UN definition? When describing intimate matters, one generally uses one's own language rather than that of a different environment. To the extent that the UN definition illuminates the topic of violence from the perspective of those women who have been victims of violence, colloquial language can provide the opportunity to formulate a well-known circumstance in a trusted language and to find a way to articulate the problem. The UN text can be suitable for women affected by violence, in order to draw attention to a problem, to talk about the problem, and to consider various different aspects of the problem.



Where are the limits? An academic who claims to have secure knowledge of the topic of “violence” and who refrains from insisting upon her credibility, has a duty to give an account of the origin and reliability of her knowledge. However, if she does not choose an explicit and unambiguous definition as her basis, she fails to provide evidence that the intervention programme is ineffective and inapplicable, that the questionnaire is inadequate and removed from reality.

5 Conclusion

An action (such as a definition process) is an act that serves a purpose. If an action is not named, but instead only a circumstance, with the demand that this is brought about, then this represents a purpose. In other words, something is not done for its own sake, but rather to fulfil an intention. Action is a means to achieve a purpose.

The connection between means and purpose suggests that it makes sense when analysing definitions of violence not to place the main focus on the definition process, but instead to begin with the intended purpose of the action. This can help to clarify whether different aims can be met independently of each other, whether they can be reached together, or whether they are incompatible with each other. In the last instance, the rational dialogue is the method for distinguishing one purpose from another or for creating compatibility.

