THE HORIZONTAL INEQUALITY APPROACH

A systematization of the horizontal inequality approach (h.i.-approach) in present conflict debates evolves on the basis of the previous chapter. Traditional assumptions as to the ethnic, racial and religious nature of group conflict have been partially abandoned in the realm of this approach. Instead, various politico-economic features are highlighted. The present chapter targets a number of key premises of the h.i.-approach, so as to prepare the ground for a series of critiques. Originally proposed by Oxford scholar Frances Stewart, the attractiveness of this approach stems from two points, i.e. from the integrated approach it offers and from the feedback that approach has solicited on the part of the international community. One may imagine the size of this feedback by weighing the following fact. During these last years, the concept has been invoked repeatedly at the United Nations.\(^1\) Keynote speeches on the root causes of conflict have been linked to horizontal inequalities.\(^2,3\) As a latest contribution, the UNDP *Human Development Report 2005* devotes special attention to horizontal inequalities.\(^4\) This is quite remarkable for an academic concept, which has thus impacted on long-term conflict prevention strategies.

The integrated approach that characterizes the h.i.-approach made it necessary to reexamine political economy’s three major schools. The h.i.-approach integrates aspects of all these schools into one comprehensive political economy of conflict. Different from other conflict models, it may not be related to one school only. Common aspects include economic substance as well as a number of general grounders. Reference to such grounders does not overthrow a basic premise of this first part. According to this premise, the political economy of conflict required exploration in sound economic terms. Only that way, one may avoid economic shallowness, which

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3. The link between these academic and practical approaches has been the World Institute for Development Economics Research in Helsinki, which is a part of the United Nations University, but has been involved in joint research activities with the Queen Elizabeth House at Oxford University of which Frances Stewart is the Director. See W. Nafziger and F. Stewart and R. Väyrynen (eds.), *War, Hunger and Displacement: The Origins of Humanitarian Emergencies*, 2 Vol., Oxford: Oxford University Press (2000).
often results when political will politicizes major schools in political economy. General grounders carry the economic substance laid out in those schools, as well as in the h.i.-approach. A profound analysis this approach designs a number of propositions.

Section 5. Main Propositions

Five propositions are designed to systematize the h.i.-approach in present conflict debates. For convenience purposes, all five propositions are put ahead. Concretely, they are the following ones:

1. Conflict is a matter of organized groups.
2. Conflict groups are primordial.
4. Economic deprivation is relative.
5. Conflict perpetuates group leadership and class structures.
6. Conflict remains internal.

Each proposition is weighed and examined against the backdrop of political economy’s three major schools. To the extent that they help explaining the h.i.-approach, this analysis includes their general grounders.

Proposition 1: Organized Group Conflict

A rather common assumption today is that conflict is not primarily a matter of individuals randomly committing violence against each other. Conflict normally involves some sort of groups that engage in organized group conflict. Generally, any conflict paradigm that lays stress upon the influential role of groups in conflict is relevant, in as much as it helps removing a bias of neo-classical development economics. The latter has primarily been concerned with the role of individuals. For example, when making economic development policies the case for conflict prevention, there has been a lot of talk about how global welfare may lower potential for conflict. However, the issue of global welfare has simply been treated in relation to the sum total of individuals in a given society. The only task accepted was how welfare gains could be distributed evenly among those individuals. Much less attention has been paid to the influence social groups possess over individuals.

The h.i.-approach seeks to reverse this bias. It, therefore, rejects development thinking in the tradition of neo-classical welfare analysis. It also discards recent efforts to correct the latter by ways of an approach that exceeds a prime focus on income disparities. A major underlying assumption on which neo-classical welfare economics has proceeded is that there is no such thing as an independent community interest apart from the interest of the individuals comprising the community.\(^5\) Chap-