

Economic Sanctions and Post-Imperial Subjectivation

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In this paper I will argue that economic sanctions can be considered a war crime and give one reason why it might not be that way, especially when economic ‘superpowers’ like the US or the European Union impose those sanctions: *Post-imperial subjectivation* as the main cause for a defect moral evaluation of different (global) situations.

In order to do this I will use two examples, both between 2015 and 2019, whereof one is considered a war crime and the other is not. The first example are bombings of the UAE in Yemen in 2015 – which are considered a war crime - and the second one are US-sanctions on Venezuela also starting in 2015. I will argue that due to the similarity in intention, means and consequences not only the bombings in Yemen but also the US-sanctions on Venezuela should be considered a war crime and that the moral differences of both are negligible.

I will give one possible explanation of why such acts are not considered a war crime but rather a way of political and economic intervention against misbehavior. I will exemplify this by showing that the differences we¹ make in judging those two examples are caused by *post-imperial subjectivation*. Post-imperial subjectivation is a combination of Ulrich Brand’s theory of the “imperial way of life” and Judith Butlers process of subjectivation. The main idea is that international power relations, which can be traced back to imperialism and post-imperial structures due to unequal political and economic power relations between the so-called “global north” and the so-called “global south” and due to the shifted way of thinking about international conflicts, are subjectivated by individuals, especially in the so-called “global north”. This causes us to morally misunderstand specific situations like the economic sanctions on Venezuela.

¹ I will use the terms we/ us repeatedly in this paper instead of a more neutral term. The reason is that I myself can write this type of opinion just due to my specific subjectivation. Although many statements are generalizable I cannot ultimately assume to be representative for everybody. What I mean by we/us is people with WEIRD-Values (Western Educated Industrialized Rich Democratic). The reason why I do this might come more clearly in the end of the paper. However, at this point it should just be emphasized that I use this wording to express a focus on the default moral judgements WEIRD-People make.

1 Motivation

In 2015 the United Arab Emirates bombed food factories and harbors in Yemen in order to purposely use hunger as a weapon of war to weaken the opponent and to discourage the Yemeni public. The NGO Save the Children estimates that 85.000 children died as a direct cause of the consequences of these bombings (Reimann, 2018). In 2019 the UN – after long examination - concluded that those actions should be considered a war crime under Article 8 of the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, specifically due to §8/2b/i./ii./iv., which includes intentional direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects and intentionally launching an attack knowing that this will cause incidental loss of life to civilians (UN News, 2019).

In the same year, 2015, the United States under the Obama administration implemented sanctions on Venezuela, which have been prolonged and intensified by the Trump-Administration. In 2017, the European Union decided to implement sanctions on Venezuela as well. In 2019 Mark Weisbrot and Jeffrey Sachs estimated that 40.000 people in Venezuela died as a direct consequence of the sanctions either because of lacking food supply or the collapse of medical services or in most cases both.

In Yemen as well as in Venezuela, innocent civilians died due to a political conflict in which they were not necessarily directly involved in. Although, in the first case, in Yemen, people died from hunger as a result of political action and in the second case, in Venezuela, people died from hunger as a result of political action, one of them has internationally be condemned as a war crime, whereas the other one has not.

Where is the difference? And if there is no difference, why are they differently assessed?

2 Sanctions as war crime

In this chapter I will argue, why economic sanctions like the US-sanctions on Venezuela can be considered a war crime due to (i) intention, (ii) method, and (iii) consequences of the sanctions.

The Geneva Convention tries to define standards for international law for humanitarian treatment during times of war. The Hague Convention is a body of international law and tries to define laws of war and especially war crimes. Additionally 123 countries signed the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in 1998 which tries to define genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression. Those three put together give the legal context of what can be defined as a war crime.

The most crucial part of the argument is that those conventions and treaties (especially the Geneva and Hague Conventions) apply only *at time of war*. There is no ordinary war happening between the US and Venezuela, therefore – one could say – the sanctions which have been part of a political and economic agenda are not touched by these conventions.

However, what has been considered as war changed over time. It is easy to see that those political and economic actions can at least be considered economic warfare as defined by the Oxford Dictionary as...

“[a]n economic strategy on the use of measures (e.g. blockade) of which the primary effect is to weaken the economy of another state.” (Oxford Dictionary, 2019a)

The US and the European Union clearly implemented different measures, like sanctions and a general trade embargo to weaken the economy of Venezuela. It might be a little bit more difficult to generalize those sanctions as being part of a ‘war’. The Oxford Dictionary defines war as ...

*“1. A state of armed conflict between different nations or states of different groups within a nation or state.
1.1 A particular armed conflict
1.2 A state of competition, conflict, or hostility between different people or groups.
1.3 A sustained effort to deal with or end a particular unpleasant or undesirable situation or condition.” (Oxford Dictionary, 2019b)*

Economic sanctions might not apply to 1.1, however, 1.2, and 1.3 are parts of the definition which fit economic sanctions or at least this example of economic sanctions. The sanctions implemented tried to “end a particular unpleasant or undesirable situation or condition”, in this case the reign of the Maduro-Government and the assumable undemocratic election process and the violations of human rights. Additionally, those sanctions cause a “conflict, or hostility between different people or groups”, which can be observed by the implications those sanctions had on the US-Venezuela relations and the inner political implications of the sanctions which at least played a part in the increased violence of protesters and military forces in Venezuela.

Human rights experts of the United Nations repeatedly argued that the kind of protection guaranteed by Geneva and Hague Conventions should also apply to civilians regardless of the official state of peace or war (Jazairy, 2018).

Furthermore, there are three important parts of an action which I will examine to see whether this action really is part of warfare as explained above. These three parts are (i.) intention, (ii.) method, and (iii.) consequences.

i. Intention of the sanctions

The sanctions imposed on Venezuela have been used to impose pressure on the Maduro-Government. It has been stated by the US-Government in 2017 that the sanctions are necessary in order to re-impose human rights and a proper legal system (Krauss, 2017) (Lugo, 2017). Additionally, the threat of military intervention by US-President Donald Trump in 2017 underlines, that the intention of the sanctions was a change of government in Venezuela (Drago, 2017).

Furthermore, Mike Pompeo in an interview on March 11th 2019 stated the following after the regime change from Maduro to Guaidó:

Matthew Lee (Interviewer): Are you satisfied with the pace of the momentum behind Guaidó and his leadership?

Mike Pompeo: Well we wish things could go faster, but I'm very confident that the tide is moving in the direction of the Venezuelan people and will continue to do so. It doesn't take much for you to see what's really going on there. The circle is tightening, the humanitarian crisis is increasing by the hour. I talked with our senior person on the ground there in Venezuela last night [...]. You can see the increasing pain and suffering that the Venezuelan people are suffering from. (McGabe, 2019)

We can conclude that although it might not have been the main intention, at least part of the plan behind the sanctions was that the suffering of civilians increases the pressure on the Maduro-Government to endorse a change of regime. Additionally, by examining the way the sanctions were implemented we will see that the results have been foreseeable.

ii. Means

Here I will focus on the most important sanctions and political actions that have been imposed on Venezuela. In 2017 the US-Government prohibited access to the US financial market for the Venezuelan government, knowing that the economy of Venezuela highly relies on access to those financial markets due to the high rate of imports and the close economic exchange especially with oil which makes up an enormous part of the Venezuelan economy (Sachs, 2019). Additionally, the US stopped trading oil with Venezuela and also pushed other countries

like India or the Russian oil exporter Gazprom towards stopping the economic relationship with the government of Venezuela.

Furthermore, in 2019 the US officially recognized **Jon Guidó** as “interim president” and restricted the access to any market to sell oil for Venezuela.

The US-Government knows that Venezuela’s economy is highly reliant on selling oil and that the de-facto embargo would cause Venezuela’s social infrastructure to collapse as it relies highly on import. After the sanctions, neither electricity nor medical aid could be provided reliably anymore. In March 2019 during the electricity crisis people died in hospitals because the power maintenance could not be assured and millions of people were left without any medication although heavily dependent on it. (Sachs, 2019).

One could argue, that the means were actually different, as it is not the same to use weapons (e.g. bombs in Yemen) and economic sanctions or trade barriers. However, I empathize that taking into account the enormous implications of both interventions this argument does not hold. Whether thousands of people die due to destroyed food factories and harbors or due to a lack of food supply in the food factories due to trade embargos does not change the fact that thousands of people are now dead.

This does not mean that those kind of excuses are commonly stated by different politicians. For example, the US sanctions on Iraq starting in 1990 caused approximately 500.000 casualties according to a UNICEF-Report (UNICEF, 2013). In a 60-Minutes Interview in 1996 Madeleine Albright – at that time ambassadress at the UN and later secretary of state – was asked about the death of 500.000 civilians (even more than in Hiroshima in 1945). After asked if the sanctions and means are justified she said “*I think, this is a very hard choice, but I think, we think, the price is worth it*” (60 Minutes, 1996)².

iii. Consequences

After discussing the intention and means of the sanctions it is important to see, what they caused. Besides the regime-change that is, at least partly, often explained as a result of the socio-economic consequences of the sanctions it is important to emphasize that the civilian population was the most affected by the sanctions and not the government (Sachs, 2019).

² The ‚price‘ in this case was to show that Iraq had an illegal WMD-Programme, which could not have been proofed up to now.

Weisbrot and Sachs state that between 2013 and 2016 real GDP declined by 24.7%, price inflation between January and August 2017 increased by an estimated annual rate between 758% and 1,350%. The cut off on oil production resulted in an estimated loss of \$6 billion in revenue in 2017³. This resulted in a massive crisis in the health sector in 2019.

The National Survey on Living Conditions (ENCOVI) found that this also led to a shortage of essential medicine of about 85% and there was approximately a 31% increase in general mortality between 2017 and 2018.

Additionally, a UN-Report from March 2019 states

“Poor households are disproportionately affected by the crisis. The proportion of Venezuelans living in poverty has increased since 2014 [...] 92% of the population lives in poverty, including 61% in extreme poverty. [...] Due to the collapse of the health system, children, patients with chronic conditions, people with disabilities, and pregnant women are particularly vulnerable. According to the latest available date, maternal mortality increase by over 65% from 2015 to 2016 [...] 25.000 pregnant woman did not receive prenatal care, and some 7.500 were only checked in the eighth and ninth months of their pregnancy [...]. Many children with disabilities are deprived of an education due to the lack of equipment adapted to their handicap in schools.” (United Nations, 2019)

With 40.000 people who died as a direct result of the sanctions, it seems difficult to make a difference between economic sanctions with such foreseeable consequences and the strategic bombing of food factories and harbors for food import. Revising the definitions of the terms ‘war’ and ‘economic warfare’ above, it can be stated that those interventions of the US and the European Union regarding Venezuela can be considered as an act of war.

The goals of the intervention in Yemen by the UAE and the intervention in Venezuela through sanctions by the US and the EU have been the same: discourage the civilian population, destroy everyday infrastructure, and weaken the legitimacy of the government. In military terms this kind of behavior is considered as dismantling psychological national defense.

To sum up, there can hardly be a significant moral difference in intention, means, and consequences of those two actions. Additionally, the intentions, methods, and consequences of

³ Most of the infrastructure, electricity generation, water supply, transportation, etc. is financed by the Venezuelan government and its profits from oil-exports.

the discussed economic sanctions match the intentions, methods, and consequences of strategic bombings like the ones in Yemen.

However, the bombings in Yemen are considered to be a war crime, whereas the sanctions on Venezuela are considered a political intervention. Given, that both are very similar as stated above it seems to be contradictory that those events are treated rather differently.

Indeed, Weisbrot and Sachs state:

“We find that the sanctions have inflicted, and increasingly inflict very serious harm to human life and health, including an estimated more than 40,000 deaths from 2017-2018; and that these sanctions would fit the definition of collective punishment of the civilian population as described in both the Geneva and Hague international conventions, to which the US is a signatory. They are also illegal under international law and treaties which the US has signed, and would appear to violate US law as well.” (Sachs, 2019)

A similar result is given by the 2019 UN-Report *Venezuela: Situational Update and 2019 Outlook* and it has been argued repeatedly by human right experts, that international law of war and war crimes should also be applicable in such situations (Jazairy, 2018).

In the next chapter I will confront two possible counterarguments, trying to explain that there is a difference in those two actions and will then proceed to show that they are not sufficient in these cases.

3 Is there a difference?

If the motive – implementing some kind of punishment and discouragement of a political opponent – and the results – foreseeable deaths of civilians – are congruent, why should there be a difference?

I will give two possible counterarguments to viewing economic sanctions under specific conditions as an act of war and show that they are not sufficient to argue that there is a difference, namely different goals and a different context.

Firstly, one could argue that there are *different goals* when we compare bombings to sanctions. The results might be somehow similar but the two actions are not comparable because the goal was different. As the UAE in Yemen directly wanted to harm civilians but the US-sanctions were just a way to weaken a government that (according to the US) violates human rights and was not properly elected in order to give the people of Venezuela the chance of democratic

elections⁴. However, this justification of goals has been contradicted by several high ranked American politicians. For example the Secretary of State at that time, Mike Pompeo admitted openly in April 2019 that the sanctions were causing pain and suffering and this would accelerate the intentional toppling of the Maduro-Government (“Pompeo: Sanctions Increase ‘Pain and Suffering’ in Venezuela (Pt 2/2),” 2019). According to this, the goal in both cases has been almost the same: the discouragement of the public to weaken or delegitimize a government.

Secondly, it can be said, that the *context was different*, as in Yemen there has been a war situation, whereas the US and Venezuela are not officially in a state of war. In Yemen, the UAE maybe meant to use the bombings to weaken the military infrastructure and the support of the public for the war and the government in Yemen in a military context. The US-sanctions can be seen in the context of a humanitarian intervention. The context cannot be used to exemplify the difference, as in both cases innocent civilians died and – this is the important part – in both cases this was *foreseeable* and it was not only a kind of ‘collateral damage’ but it was *intentionally planned* that people would die as a consequence of the actions. Therefore, it can hardly be argued that the consequences of the action are morally legit (I am stating that it is not justified to kill 40.000 innocent people intentionally or even taking the risk of this to happen – a statement hopefully everyone can agree on). But neither was the intention (as described above in both cases the intention was to cause pain and suffering for innocent civilians – which I also will not argue about). This kind of human tragedy can never be justified. If it were just about the context every genocide could be excused if the reasons were only convincing enough.

However, as argued above, the intentional death of thousands of people due to *avoidable* actions, of which the consequences were *foreseeable*, and *intentionally planned* should not be given the option to be morally justified. If one accepts, that the actions in Venezuela and Yemen can be justified, there is no limitation to justifying the death of innocent people in any number. Additionally, those kind of actions are legally permitted due to the Geneva and Hague International Conventions.

Even though this paper assessed the moral difference between the two interventions as being negligible, why is there such a difference in the public perception of strategic bombings and economic sanctions? I will argue in the next two chapters that this has two main reasons: Firstly,

⁴ I will not argue whether or not the Venezuelan government was properly democratically elected and whether they violated basic human rights or not. This argument has been given by the US-government several times to justify the sanctions (ONLINE, 2019).

The 'global north' has an immense advantage in power when it comes to economic interventions compared to military interventions compared to the 'global south'. This means that it is easier for countries from the global north than for others to implement economic interventions and additionally economic interventions are easier to implement than military interventions. Secondly, the subjectivation of an "imperial way of life" causes us to have a morally biased perception of those circumstances.

In order to do this, I will formulate the thesis, that the role of military interventions of the so-called 'global north' in the so-called 'global south' have partly been replaced by economic and political interventions.

4 Military and Economic Intervention

Military interventions, as well as economic interventions, aim to influence and possibly change the politics of a foreign country. In the 20th century military interventions have mostly been used by the US, countries of the European Union or the EU as a whole, or the USSR/ Russia. The US and the EU are referred to as the 'global north' and the USSR/ Russia can be as well (depending on the notion). However, in the special case of USSR/ Russia it has to be mentioned that although not everyone might count them to the 'global north' they have been and are still one of the most influential military superpowers, especially in the 20th century.

According to Seybolt, there are 4 types of (humanitarian) military intervention (Seybolt, 2007):

1. Help deliver aid (Norther Iraq 1991, Kosovo 1999, East Timor 1999, Bosnia and Herzegovina 1993-95, Somalia 1992-95)
2. Protect aid operations (Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992-95, Somalia 1992-95)
3. Save the victims (Bosnia and Herzegovina 1993-95, Rwanda 1994)
4. Defeat the perpetrators (Kosovo 1999, Rwanda 1994)

All of those can be referred to as 'humanitarian' military interventions which are often legitimized by 'western' values such as (economic) liberty or democracy. However, especially in the late 1990s a global movement emerged that was opposed to those kind of military interventions and regarded them as a way to primarily oppress the 'global south' even more and to impose 'western' interests on them. This movement was strongly connected with an anti-free-trade movement which had similar concerns (Graeber, 2013).

Nevertheless, whether those accusations are true or not, it cannot be denied that such types of interventions create a dependency towards the (successful) country of the 'global north' that intervened.

My thesis is that military interventions by the ‘global north’ in countries of the ‘global south’ in the 20th century have partly been replaced by economic and/ or political interventions (such as sanctions) in the 21st century.

I will now give a short argument of why the way of intervening changed between the 20th and the 21st century that will consist of two parts: (i.) the change in international power relations after the decline of the USSR and (ii.) the shift in politics and warfare after the 11th of September 2001.

i. The decline of the USSR

The 20th century between world war two and the dispersal of the USSR was minted by the cold-war, a steady tension between two highly armed superpowers. A lot of conflicts between the US and the USSR were fought as proxy wars, like in Afghanistan, which often started as humanitarian military interventions. It is worth emphasizing, that the USSR supported different (communist) countries, of which most of them are nowadays referred to be part of the “global south”. With the decline of the USSR international power relations shifted and the US emerged as one of the driving forces in global politics, joined by the European Union a little bit later exhibiting only small differences in ideology (compared to the differences between the US and the USSR).

After the fall of the iron curtain military tensions weakened and although there are many different, complicated wars happening right now, the tension cannot be compared to a global nuclear threat at the peak of the cold war. Although I will not go into the issue whether or not proxy wars are still being fought at the moment and which countries are involved in them, it appears to be the case that proxy wars are not the focus of military interventions anymore and the tactics of international politics changed. At some point military interventions lost importance, especially a few years after the decline of the USSR.

A second important aspect is that the struggle between the two biggest economic systems - which were in permanent competition - ended and that one economic system, American/ European liberal capitalism, became more influential than other economic ideas at the end of the 20th century.

The shift of global military advantage towards the US and the dominance of the American/ European economic system changed the means and the goals of international interventions. Additional to the increasing opposition to military interventions, the so-called ‘global north’

found a different way of interfering in foreign politics, namely, economic interventions such as sanctions.

ii. The Aftermath of 9/11

After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on the 11th of September 2001 international and domestic politics globally, but especially in the US, changed. On the one hand there was less tolerance towards criticism of US-foreign policy within the US and a focus on liberal values instead, in order to not lose crucial support in the following “*war on terror*”(Müller, 2019). This also resulted in a much stricter handling of criticism of military and economic actions of American politics (Graeber, 2013).

On the other hand, US foreign policy focused on fighting old and newly emerged terrorist groups especially in the Middle East and Asia. Additionally, the type of warfare changed after 9/11 towards guerilla warfare. The following wars of the 21st century that resulted from those occurrences, could not be compared to the wars of the 20th century. The state or nation as leading power of a war gradually became less important and groups which did not necessarily adhere themselves as part of existing states but rather as autonomous radical groups became more important. Non-governmental military forces might often have an advantage in modern types of guerilla warfare as they are better connected to the locals and can easier go underground. This change of warfare makes state-led armies more likely to suffer higher losses which are difficult to justify in the homeland to get public support for these kind of interventions (Department of the Army, 2009).

Therefore, also the aim of military interventions changed such as that the roles as described by Seybolt above could not be justified that easily because there was not necessarily a nation or a (at least partly accepted) leader which could be assisted by humanitarian military intervention.

Those two processes and the emerging power of internationalized financial institutions like the IMF or the World-bank made it necessary (ad ii.) or at least favorable (ad i.) to change the means of foreign policy. I argue that this happened in a similar way as military interventions were used to intervene in domestic politics in foreign countries in the 20th century. In the 21st century economic sanctions become favorable.

In the 20th century the US-Military intervened in Cuba (1961), Bolivia (1967), El Salvador (1977-1992), Nicaragua (1981), Panama (1989), Columbia (1990) in Southern America through different types of military interventions (logistical support, fighting troops, military presence, and assassinations). They now intervene in Venezuela economically.

This does not mean that there have been no economic sanctions issued as interventions in the 20th century (like in Cuba 1958) or that there have been no military interventions in the 21st century (like in the Middle East 2014 or in Syria 2017 and 2018), but economic sanctions were often used simultaneously or implemented before military interventions started. Also, the preferred type of intervention might change gradually towards economic intervention and economic warfare instead of military presence.

This offers a way to intervene within domestic politics of foreign countries in a way that is easier to justify because it is easier to explain that ‘dictators’ should not have access to their foreign bank accounts, than it is to explain why soldiers should fight a war and might die on foreign territory. Additionally, as is shown in Venezuela this method of intervention can be very successful with relatively little effort.

However, it is hard to justify why 40.000 people in a foreign country had to die due to US and EU economic policies just for a certain political agenda and why those policies seem to target innocent civilians instead of ‘crucial dictators’. But it seems that this is harder to make visible to the broader audience.

After explaining why sanctions should be considered a war crime and why economic sanctions are likely to be more favorable when it comes to intervening in other countries’ politics, there is one question that remains open: If there is barely a moral difference between military interventions that are considered a war crime and economic interventions, which almost have the same consequences as those war crimes, why is the death of thousands of people in war worse than the death of thousands of people due to economic sanctions? In the next chapter I will try to give a possible reason for the possible (mis-)evaluation.

5 Post-Imperial Subjectivation

In this chapter I will try to give a rough idea of why we seem to perceive actions that are the same when it comes to intention, method, and consequences differently depending on our own position within a global society. This question might be considered part of a rather complex argument beyond the scope of this paper, but in the end I just want to give an intuitive notion of what, according to my point of view, is the main reason why we tend to think that the sanctions on Venezuela imposed by the US and the EU are not as ‘bad’ as the bombing of food factories in Yemen.

At first, the individual level of this (mis-)perception, can be described with what Judith Butler calls “subjectivation”. She relies on Althusser when defining subjectivation as a process where

an individual (“a subject”) impersonates structures of a society in a process of the definition of the self within a society. At the same time, a subject also has the possibility or the potential to rely on something like the self, some parts of the individual that are not solely influenced by a social process (Althusser would deny this)⁵. With this idea Butler tries to describe (among other things) why people might adhere to a system, that is actually not beneficiary to them, e.g. a system which relies on their exploitation but which cannot give them a fair share of their respective input. She calls this the “Psychic Life of Power” (Butler, 1997).

I am, and most of the people with whom I have a closer relationship with are as well, part of the “global north” and therefore we are also part of what can be called the ‘western ideological hemisphere’. Human beings seem to have a tendency to adhere to society and in this process they tend to adapt to the standards that are already socially constructed. In the context of this paper this would mean that our subjectivation is a process in which we adapt ourselves to the society in which we live. Or to put it in easier words: the closer something is, the more likely we are tempted to agree with it.

We all live in a society and in each society there are dominant ideas which try to organize human interactions. For this purpose it does not matter whether we call it ‘western values’, culture, democratic values, liberal values or something else. The only thing that matters is that there are some ideas in our society with which we grow up to and which we tend to impersonate in the process of subjectivation. This at the same time means that we take those higher instances and implement them into our own thinking and even further into our own way to see the world and our own actions without actively reflecting them.

What are the kind of social structures, that we subjectivate? This paper is not the place to discuss the certain and specific forms of values in depth, but in the following chapter I will refer to them with the sociological term WEIRD⁶-values. I will now argue, that those specific WEIRD-Values are partly influenced by what Ulrich Brandt calls “imperial way of life” and that the different perception of two kinds of occurrences, in this case the bombing of food factories in Yemen and the sanctions on Venezuela, can be traced back to the subjectivation of an imperial way of life when we also take global power structures into account.

⁵ It is really important for the following argumentation at this point to emphasize that Althusser relies on a model that assumes that the process of subjectivation is itself completely subject of the subjectivation. Therefore it is hardly possible that one can break out of this system. Butler, however, takes the same model but adapts it such that it implies that there has to be some space of freedom for the individual in which it is possible to change the outcome of the process of subjectivation individually.

⁶ Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic-Values

Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen define an imperial lifestyle as a description of the conditions which form our everyday life. This is influenced by four major factors (Brand and Wissen, 2017):

1. Capitalist production and consumption in the global north that affects the global south (mainly due to exploitation and hunger)
2. This way of production and consumption causes crises and conflicts due to the limited amount of natural resources in the global south and reduces the living standards in affected countries
3. This imperial way of life stabilizes our social relations, because it allows the global north to increase its wealth
4. An imperial way of life generates competition between different countries and individuals

I want to argue that this lifestyle does not only affect political relations within a global context but also is subjectivated by individuals in form of WEIRD-Values as we are the ones who profit from this lifestyle.

As countries from the global north (like the US and European countries) profit from this way of living they do not have the same critical perception as in other countries⁷. Why should one disagree with a system from which she or he profits?

Imposing economic sanctions relies on some kind of economic power. If a country without necessary resources or other types of power over another country (e.g. through already existing trade relations) tries to impose economic sanctions on a WEIRD-Country they are most likely to fail. This has three main reasons. Firstly, the WEIRD-Country is not as depended on the “weaker” country as the other way around. Secondly, WEIRD-Countries are often internationally connected with other WEIRD-Countries or are more influential in international institutions like the UN or NATO. Thirdly, the WEIRD-Country is more likely to find other sources for resources and different channels for economic trade.

Those three reasons all correspond to the findings of Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen in “imperial way of life”. The lines along which these differences are separated correspond to the countries that were involved in imperialism which are the ones that are now the WEIRD-Countries. Those countries also dominate global power-structures and the most important

⁷ See for example the protests in Southern America

economic and military institutions (UN, NATO, IMF, Worldbank,...). In this context their dominance can be seen, considering “imperial way of life”, as a direct consequence of Imperialism. This is also supported by statistical data for example about global production structures (Smith, 2016).

The main idea now is that we subjectivate these power structures, this lifestyle, and all their implications into our own thinking so that it becomes rather hard for us to differentiate between what we objectively should think and what is our opinion due to this subjectivation (or in another way not only does it become harder to differentiate but those subjectivized thoughts are conceived to be an objective opinion).

The question arises how we should handle post-imperial subjectivation. If post-imperial subjectivation leads to defect moral evaluations of different situations we have a duty to overcome this misleading subjectivation. According to the theory of subjectivation by Butler the only possibility would be “the self”⁸. The most sufficient way of establishing this would be to take on a perspective of the sovereign I from somewhere else, e.g. some place where the I is not presumed as a center of control, somewhat an objective point of view.

One way to do this in the specific case of the economic sanctions in Venezuela as described above would be to say that once we accept basic human rights like established in the human rights convention and we also accept the Geneva and Den Hague Convention⁹ we have to conclude that those economic sanctions are a violation of all of them and therefore are morally barely different from the bombings of the UAE on Yemen. As the intentions, means, and consequences of the economic sanctions are similar to the intentions, means and consequences of the bombings morally they are both to be condemned.

This does not mean that all economic sanctions are necessarily morally bad but as long as they harm civilians (as economic sanctions usually do) they are. Another situation would be to impose sanctions on companies that produce weapons and means of destruction. However, this is barely done (see the discussion after the bombings in Yemen).

However, individually overcoming this post-imperial subjectivation just helps in specific situations and is by far not guaranteed to be a perfect solution as it itself might be the subject of the subjectivation in the process of achieving a somewhat objective point of view. To go

⁸ Here the difference between Butler and Althusser emphasized in Chapter 5 is important.

⁹ However, those Conventions are likely to be themselves biased by subjectivation of WEIRD-Values therefore using them alone as a measurement of reasonable moral evaluation can be very dangerous as well.

about this problem it would be necessary to overcome post-imperial power structures on all levels.

6 Conclusion

In this paper I argued that economic sanctions (like the US-sanctions on Venezuela) should be considered a war crime when they affect civilians the same way as other war crimes do (like the bombings of Yemeni food factories by the UAE). One reason why this is not the case might be *post-imperial subjectivation*.

In the second chapter I have shown that there is no morally relevant difference between some economic sanctions and war crimes in intention, means and consequences and argued that economic sanctions can be seen as a way of intervening in a country that is comparable to military interventions and therefore should be evaluated by adequate conventions like the Geneva Convention, Den Hague Convention, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

In Chapter 3 I showed that two possible counterarguments - that there are different goals and that there is a different context – are not sufficient to differentiate between the two exemplary situations morally.

After I have argued in Chapter 4 *Military and Economic Intervention* that military interventions are likely to be replaced by economic interventions in the 21st century and that military interventions are much harder to justify, I showed that the subjectivation of WEIRD-values makes it possible that we are likely to think that economic sanctions are not necessarily bad (but also do not make us believe that they are necessarily good). Due to that subjectivation we are likely to condemn military intervention but do not think the same about economic sanctions. The specific subjectivation of (post-) imperial, WEIRD-values is called *post-imperial subjectivation*. Those WEIRD-Values are at least partly formed by global power structures, which can be traced back to imperialism.

Furthermore, post-imperial subjectivation is not restricted to economic sanctions. As the subjectivation happens on all levels and in many different ways in our everyday life, it might also affect different fields. For example, what is our moral standpoint regarding international trade and especially free trade? Why do we buy clothes that are produced under bad working conditions in poor countries? Why are international institutions structured the way they are? How does post-imperial subjectivation affect people that are not from WEIRD-Countries? These questions and many more leave a lot of open questions for other cases to which we can apply the concept of post-imperial subjectivation.

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