EXPLORING THE NEXUS BETWEEN CULTURE AND SOCIAL COHESION: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

- MUCH INTEREST NATIONALLY & INTERNATIONALLY IN SOCIAL COHESION
- IMPORTANT FOR OVERCOMING SOCIAL PROBLEMS SUCH AS:
  - POOR ECONOMIC GROWTH
  - VIOLENT CONFLICT
WHAT EXACTLY IS SC?

- CONTESTED CONCEPT
- ‘PROFOUNDLY AMBIGUOUS CONCEPT’ (JENSON 2002)
- TWO MAIN STRANDS OF THOUGHT
  - ‘VALUE CONSENSUS APPROACH’ (DURKHEIM)
  - ‘TRAFFIC-SYSTEM APPROACH’

PLURALISTS

CITIZENS ADHERE TO PROCEDURES WHICH ADJUST THE COMPETING NORMS AND VALUES IN SOCIETY
DESPITE THE LACK OF CONSENSUS...

- IT IS CLEARLY A COMPLEX & MULTI-DIMENSIONAL PHENOMENON

- JENSON INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING DIMENSIONS:

- MONASH U. INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING:
RELATIONSHIP BTW CULTURE & SC

- Multiculturalism initially seen by many as a ‘problem to be resolved’

- Perceived in the conflict resolution literature as an attribute of ‘deep-rooted’, or ‘protracted’ social conflict, deserving special attention

- Scholars such as John Burton and Edward Azar accordingly developed specialised resolution approaches in response to conflicts based on cultural difference
International writing on Social Cohesion has burgeoned in response to perceived threats to the social order emanating from the impact of globalization & accelerated migration.

Reflects the ‘emergence’ of more multicultural societies in states of the West.

Tasked with the development of a ‘cohesive’ new society, based on divergent identities & cultures.

There is pervasive feeling of ‘things falling apart’, or ‘not working’
South African situation is very different. Although inward migration from neighbouring countries, & all that that entails is important for us,

Prime motivation for us must be the imperative of forging a cohesive society out of elements that were formerly artificially separated, & set against each other during apartheid era.
PROMINENT INTERNATIONAL INDICES OF SC

- Since 2010, a rise in the number of indices of SC in the literature.
- We have scanned that literature & present some of the more noteworthy of these.
  - German-based OECD measure of SC known as the Social Cohesion Radar,
  - Score approach to measuring SC in post-conflict societies,
  - African-focused measure of the CRPD.
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<th>SOCIAL COHESION RADAR</th>
<th>CRPD</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
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<td>-Social Networks of members of the entity</td>
<td>-inequality</td>
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<td>-The level of trust in others</td>
<td>-trust</td>
<td>-human security,</td>
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<td>-Degree of acceptance of diversity</td>
<td>-identity</td>
<td>-satisfaction with civic life</td>
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<td>institutions,</td>
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<td>-perceived corruption</td>
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<td>-Strength of identification with the entity</td>
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<td>-negative stereotypes</td>
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<td>-Level of trust in institutions</td>
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<td>-intergroup anxiety</td>
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<td>-Perceived level of societal fairness</td>
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<td>-positive feelings</td>
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<td>-Level of solidarity</td>
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<td>-Extent to which people recognize social</td>
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<td>-Degree of civic participation</td>
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South African Radar for SC

SATISFACTION

IDENTIFICATION

TRUST
In general...

- Most of the indices are perceptions-based, &

- Calculated on the back of existing ‘big data’ sets
  - Afrobarometer, World Values, StatsSA, SASSA

- In all of these measures, we find very little reference to cultural indicators for SC
- This is strange, considering stress placed on importance of cultural determinants of SC

- Cultural activity seen as creative and collaborative, and forging bonds

- Quite often govt depts of culture given responsibility for SC

- & this is the case for SA, as well
Some reasons for this:

- Not all societies well-endowed with big data on cultural activities
- Therefore, perhaps more difficult to make direct comparisons
- Cultural difference is most frequently seen as a source of division, rather than of unity.
- Much of the concern about a lack of social cohesion, especially in Western society, is the result of a feeling of a threat posed to the social order by developing diversity.
We want next to consider which ‘cultural’ indicators of social cohesion to include in a potential measure of social cohesion in general, and for South Africa in particular.
Remember...

- SC can be both a backward looking notion, reflecting nostalgia for ‘something that never existed’, or it can be forward-looking, to ‘imagine a more positive future which seeks new patterns & innovation’.

- The first interpretation can be quite problematic = cultural chauvinism, xenophobia, too much SC

- The latter notion holds out greater promise for South Africa. Given the history of our society, it is the only available practical option.
SC, Institutions and processes

- SC is as much a process as an end-state, & it is in the examination of that process that we can best discover cultural indicators of social cohesion.

- Much of the literature also stresses the institutional aspect of SC

- Diverse cultures must be celebrated & their expression afforded equal protection. Finding evidence for policy promoting equal access to the benefits of societal membership - & this is important
‘The cohesion of modern societies depends on institutions’ capacity to recognise and mediate politicised diversity.’

Jenson: 2002
Policy Advice

- Institutions; particularly those of democracy & government are of utmost importance.
- It is stating the obvious that it is vital to stress the positive aspects of our diverse society – our different food, styles, colours, languages, accents, and histories and traditions;
- To do so in positive ways – not to drive political wedges between cultural components for purposes of political constituency construction (Think: *White, monopoly capital*).
...Policy Advice

- In this regard, our (recently embattled) constitution provides a wonderful foundation, &...

- is therefore an important component of any culture-regarding element of social cohesion,

- So to defend the constitution’s protections of cultural & individual rights.
So by measuring perceptions of state protections of rights to cultural diversity, we actually provide an idea of the health of cultural diversity.