



UNIVERSITÄT
BAYREUTH

**„Cultural sovereignty vs. political utilization
– the global ethnic paradigm“**

an essay by

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for the

Seminar on “Globalisation – A Critical Approach”

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Bayreuth, January 2003

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Introduction

In the ongoing debate about the process of globalization, ethnic minorities have claimed some attention to themselves – maybe despite or because of the fact that global positions towards politics, economics and culture are discussed and found.

The dozen years since the end of the Cold War and the rapid changes that came with the change on the political stage have made us observers in conflicts centering around the issue of ethnic minorities. The violent conflict in the former Yugoslavian republic, in Kosovo and Macedonia are probably first to jump into the mind of the reader when thinking of the issue of ethnic minorities.

Ethnic minorities have underlined their cultural distinctiveness and claim a right to preserve their culture, their traditions, their language. But when and in what contexts is this claim made? Is this claim justified in general? Are there rights which groups could have? And is there a right to preserve one's culture?

These questions I would like to debate in the following essay and show the diversity of contexts in which ethnic minorities are placed, I also want to show the diversity of claims that arise out of these contexts and how these claims are treated by the majority in a country. I also want to discuss if ethnicity is sometimes used as a vehicle for political or economic claims.

My focus is on the global ethnic paradigm – and solutions to it.

I

An attempt to define “ethnicity”

What is ethnicity and what is an ethnic minority? What is the culture of an ethnic minority? In order to find an answer, it's important to define the terms that are being used.

Regardless of how ethnic was defined in historical contexts¹, most people would define ethnicity as “group of humans with *common culture*”² but this could relate to any kind of group: a religion, a Golf Club, members of a Workers Union, fans of a Heavy Metal Rock Band etc.

A more comprehensive definition of ethnicity relates “to people whose unity rests on *racial, linguistic, religious or cultural ties*”³. Yet, another definition highlight the geographic aspect: “as ethnic unit (ethnicity) is described a group of

¹ Originally „ethnos“ describes the non-Greek states outside of the polis of ancient Greece. In the 18th and 19th century, it describes phenotypic and racial criteria to distinguish groups of humans. (Zurawski, pp.2 and following)

² Müller, p.229

³ Cayne, p.324

humans [...] in a *common area of settlement*, which clearly distinguish themselves through customs of living and goods from their neighbors”⁴.

Given this premises, what is an ethnic *minority*? Usually, a minority is “less than half of the total”⁵, but in political contexts it refers to “a group distinguished by its religious, political, racial or other characteristics from a larger group or society of which it forms a part”⁶. Apparently there seems to be a dualism between a majority and minority: there has to be something which makes the minority different.

For an ethnic minority, this would be common cultural ties which would distinguish this smaller group from the bigger group. However, is the connection between both only co-existing? Or is in the term “ethnic minority” (sometimes also labeled as “national minority”) a power relation implied, like this definition from Cold War East-Germany claims: “National minority – in a state an existing, smaller nationality, for which the state has to secure the equality with the larger nationality. While in socialistic states the rights of national minorities are entirely guaranteed, national minorities in capitalistic states are often means or objects of increased exploitation, irredentism and racial hate.”⁷ This analysis is likely to be incorrect, yet it points to some kind of *power relation* between the majority and minority.

Or how about the ethnic group itself? “Minorities (in international law) are groups of people, which distinguish themselves from the majority population through origin, language, culture or religious conviction, and possess a political *group identity*.”⁸

We have gathered five criteria for an ethnic minority:

- members have common cultural ties
- is distinguishable from majority population
- associated with a common area of settlement
- uneven power relations (if only slightly uneven)
- possess a political group identity

Therefore, the definition I will use is the following:

An ethnic minority is a group of humans within a state that is associated with a common area of settlement. The members of the group have common cultural ties (language, customs, traditions, religion or origin) which make them distinguishable from the majority population. The ethnic minority possesses a political group identity and the power relation to the majority population is or has been uneven or imbalanced.

⁴ Vanhorn, p. 247

⁵ Cayne, p. 637

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Zwahr, Book 4, p. 35

⁸ Vanhorn, p. 596

NB: The above mentioned definition does incorporate aboriginal indigenous people, especially when speaking about countries where the ancestors of the majority population have once migrated into the country.

However, this definition specifically does not incorporate migrant groups in a particular country, like the migrants from Turkey within Germany. Although the phenomena of neighborhoods with a high percentage of Turkish people exists, however this is not what is meant by a common area of settlement. Mostly these areas develop within a city because of economical (migrants lack the economic resources to have much of a choice where to live within a city) or cultural (the new migrants tend to associate with people of same language and customs) reason – and not specifically because this area is a traditional area of settlement.

II

Why not deconstructing ethnicity?

From the developed criteria, ethnicity appears as a rather artificial category to describe human beings. Without commenting on the ongoing debate about how much of human behavior is inherited, transmitted by genes or encoded in DNA, it is clear that the criteria of ethnicity are developed or ascribed characteristics.

The ability to speak seems to be influenced by the human genes. Nevertheless, language is constantly changing and experience shows that the mother tongue can differ from within two or three generations (like in the case of most migrant families).

Traditions and customs have the tendency to change just at the same rate that overall human behavior changes, mobility and interexchange increases and the general way of living has to adapt to new situations.

Even religion, as one of the most constant factors in human culture, is undergoing change. Maybe the tendency of human beings to explain unexplained through the existence of supreme, supernatural entities (Gods) might be a natural phenomena, but the detailed differences among the variety of beliefs in supernatural beings are no natural inherited characteristic – they were developed.

Origin is the one aspect of human culture that can't change: but as mobility of human beings increase, the origins of ancestors become irrelevant to the definition of one's own culture.

How about the common area of settlement? Certainly one could argue that certain environments stimulate people to use certain traditions and customs. Additionally, natural selection obviously favors humans who have genetic

dispositions suited to that area. Therefore one could argue that a certain set of cultures and genes are “natural” for certain geographic area. But when considering that whole populations have migrated over large geographic distances, taking with them all other aspects of ethnicity (language, religion, customs and traditions) and yet still have been able to survive in the new environment – it is clear that this aspect is not a “natural” characteristic of ethnicity.

The other aspects of ethnicity – group identity, uneven power relations, distinguishability between majority and ethnic minority – indicate that ethnicity is constructed in the context of human societies. It is constructed through members within and outside of the ethnic group, gains or loses importance through the course of time and is subject to constant change.

This look of ethnicity is opposed to the idea that there’s some kind of “naturalness to ethnicity”⁹, in fact ethnicity has an “interactive”¹⁰ and “contextual”¹¹ character - explained furthermore in chapter VI.

Nevertheless, in all ethnic conflicts, the above-mentioned criteria of ethnicity play a strong role. In ethnic conflicts, the importance of sharing the same culture, language, religion, customs is highlighted, the differences to the majority population are underlined, the group identity is strengthened.

Isn’t it strange that such an unfixed, obviously constructed category like ethnicity becomes so important for many people? What makes ethnicity so attractive, that humans develop such a strong identification with their ethnicity?

I think there are three main reasons:

First – ethnicity is very much a *local* thing, even though it’s a global phenomena. As human organization developed from small groups (tribes) to large groups (nations and now supranational statelike organizations), human identification extended to regional or national matters. However, this process is not linear and infinite. The discussion about an (maybe not yet existing) European identity within the European Union, shows that people are not ready yet to identify themselves with the supranational or global level.¹²

Even though the global level of human affairs plays a strong role in our daily life, the regional level and local level are at the center of focus for most people when they consider their identity. Regions offer the right balance between cultural similarities, understandable complexity and political importance. In other words: People identify with the regional level because it is easier for them to identify with

⁹ Smith, p. 85

¹⁰ Horowitz, p. 73

¹¹ Kukathas, p. 232

¹² cf. COE

common cultural ties in their region, they have an understanding about the developments within that region and yet the region is big enough to be able to influence the general development of society.

Second – ethnicity is a powerful category in which alleged or real economic or political imbalances can be fought against. Political and economic demands can gain greater momentum if attached to an ethnicity.

Third – ethnicity is a comfortable category to which to attach political discrimination. As harsh as it sounds, ethnicity can be a welcome vehicle to politics that are aimed at benefiting the majority on the costs of minorities.

The latter two reasons are contrasted to the seemingly legitimate wish to identify with regional affairs. This, in general terms, is the global ethnic paradigm.

III

Ethnicity across the globe

Ethnic minorities live in very different situations, the conflicts between them and the majority populations vary from one country to the other. Let's have a look how ethnic minorities differ from each other.

A) Amount and size

Most countries in the world are nation-states. Nation states are not only “territorial-political units [...] whose borders coincide or nearly coincide with the territorial distribution of a national group”¹³, the majority population has a fairly homogenous culture. Typical nation-states are for example France and Italy.

In these nation-states, the size of ethnic minorities is relatively small compared to the majority population. The amount of ethnic minorities depends on the size of the state: a small state like Finland has basically two minorities, Sami people in the north (0,04%) and Swedish Fins in the south(6.6% of the total population)¹⁴. In the People's Republic of China, there are more than 55 acknowledged ethnic minorities, some 25 more strive for acknowledgment. However, the total amount is 'only' 75 million people (7% of the total population).

There are some states which are considered multi-ethnic states. The population among these states consists of a multitude of ethnic groups of about the same size. Typical examples of a multi-ethnic state is Indonesia, with

¹³ Connor, pp. 377-397

¹⁴ Harenberg, Book 1, p. 490

Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Batak, Mhankabauese, Balinese, Menadonese, Dayak, Ambonese and further ethnic groups.¹⁵

A multi-ethnic state in Western Europe is Belgium. The two ethnic groups of approximately the same size, are the Flemings, who live in the north of Belgium, and the Walloons, who live in the south.¹⁶

B) Language and language related rights

Usually language is one of the more determining factors of an ethnic minority and also the category under which an ethnic minority becomes easiest distinguishable. Sometimes the difference in language is only a dialect compared to the language of the majority population.

The rights concerning language are based around two issues:

1) *Official Language*: in some countries, ethnic minorities have achieved that their mother tongue language became the second official language in their region. For examples, in 1979 the Spanish Statutes about the Autonomy of Regions made Basque an official language in the Western Pyrenees where the Basques-people mainly live.¹⁷ However, most ethnic minorities do not have their specific language as a auxiliary official language.

2) *Mother Tongue Education*: the situation is completely different with education in the language of an Ethnic minority. The demand for such education is often assented because naturally through education in mother tongue, it is also possible to transmit customs and tradition. The Hungarian Minority in Rumania, the Sorbs and the Danish in Germany, the Swedish Minority in Finland or the Albanian Minority in Macedonia have extended mother tongue education on the primary level, in Macedonia and Finland also on the secondary (High Schools) and tertiary level (Universities) of higher education.¹⁸

C) Political rights

The ethnic minorities across the globe live in very different political contexts, however the political rights of minorities can be clustered in two groups: power-allocation rights and autonomy rights.

1) *Power-Allocation*: in most democratic countries, it is aimed at integrating ethnic minorities and establish a so called “consociational”¹⁹ form of government. This is characterized by

- power-sharing (or government by grand coalition): majorities and minorities cooperate in governing a country. In Switzerland it was

¹⁵ Harenberg, Book 2, p. 756

¹⁶ Harenberg, Book 1, pp. 160-162

¹⁷ Harenberg, Book 3, p. 1652

¹⁸ Harenberg, Book 1, pp. 378, 490, Book 2, p. 960, Book 3, p. 1447

¹⁹ Inspired by Ashworth and its Preface by Lijphart, pp. XI

possible to develop such system of government. Through high autonomy of the regions (Kantons) and a power-sharing system on the federal level, the three main ethnic groups (basically German, French, and Italian Swiss people) cooperate well in governing the country²⁰.

- possibility to veto a majority decision: I am not sure whether any ethnic minority across the globe has the factual right to veto a majority decision, however this demand was raised in two prominent cases: first, the Serbian minority in the Kosovo region demanded a right to veto any decisions made by the international community regarding the Kosovo²¹, second the Albanian minority in Macedonia asked for a right to veto on Albanian issues in the Macedonian Parliament²² – both claiming that otherwise their issues will not be taken into account.
- proportionality: the size of the ethnic minority is to be taken into account when determining political representation, civil service appointments and allocation of public funds. The Lebanese System of proportionality in government offices, guaranteed political stability between the Christian and the Muslim population until the official proportions were not representing the numerical figures anymore – which resulted in the civil war ongoing since 1975.²³

2) Autonomy²⁴: ethnic minorities often claim collective rights of self-determination and self-government. These demands for autonomy can be categorized as following:

- territorial autonomy: indicates the self-rule concerning issues like education, culture, use of minority language, environment, local planning, natural resources, economic development, local policing functions, and housing, health, and other social services²⁵. Territorial autonomy towards ethnic minority is practiced in a variety of states, like Finland, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Denmark, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, United Kingdom, Turkey, Iraq, India, China, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, Cyprus, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Sudan, Senegal, Canada, United States, Mexico, Brazil, Nicaragua, and Panama²⁶.
- language and educational autonomy: see III, B
- cultural autonomy: incorporates the preservation and conservation of cultural goods, masterpieces of art, archive materials, writings and similar objects, but also the ownership and publication of media like

²⁰ Harenberg, Book 3, p. 1522, Lehmbuch, pp. 43-60

²¹ cf. Discovery

²² cf. Radio Free Europe

²³ Harenberg, Book 2, p. 1114

²⁴ Inspired by Ermacora, pp.63-66

²⁵ Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations, p. 20

²⁶ Hurst, p.1

newspapers, television and radio²⁷. In the Netherlands, the Friesians have received extended cultural autonomy and even own their own television “Omrop Fryslân”²⁸.

D) Economic situation

There are economic disparities among the ethnic minorities across the globe – however most of these economic differences mirror the economic disparities between the different states and nations on the globe.

Far more interesting are economic disparities between an ethnic minority and a majority population. Surprisingly, in most countries the ethnic minorities economical situation is not much different from the economic situation of the majority population. As an example, the Sorbs in Germany have the same standard of living as the majority of Germans.

However, there are exceptions to the rule. The Sami people in Finland have a larger unemployment rate and other economic difficulties – however these difficulties are related to the geographically peripheral area of settlement.

Often economic differences are also due to problems concerning language and education, especially when the demands for autonomy in these fields are not granted or, even worse, efforts of assimilation by the majority population are underway.²⁹

E) Ethnic Conflicts

In 1995, there were thirty-five major armed intrastate conflicts underway around the world³⁰. Most of these conflicts can involved ethnic minorities.

The more prominent conflicts in the late 90ies of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century were

- the conflicts in former Yugoslavia (with the separation of the Slovenian, Bosnian, Croatian and Macedonian State),
- the conflict in the Kosovo region of Serbia and the conflicts with the Albanian ethnic minority in Macedonia,
- in Spain, the Basque movement of separation from the Spanish State, and especially their violent wing ETA,
- the separation of the East-Timor province from Indonesia,
- the conflicts between Hutu and Tutsi in Central Africa, culminating in the genocide of Rwanda in 1994

²⁷ Ermacora, p.28

²⁸ cf. Omrop Fryslân

²⁹ The information concerning the economic situation of the Chinese minority in Indonesia, the Sami minority in Finland and the Sorbs in Germany were gathered through personal contacts to other members of the International Youth Parliament (where I am a member as well). Therefore the information is not qualified.

³⁰ According to Harvard Project on Internal Conflict at the JFK School, cf. Lipschutz, p.72

- the conflicts around autonomy rights in the Tibet Region in China
- the border disagreements in Northern India, Pakistan and in the Kashmere region
- the violent disputes in Chechnya in Russia.

Uncounted are the nonviolent ethnic conflicts – mainly revolving around the issue of political and cultural autonomy. It seems that the amount of the violent ethnic conflicts has increased sharply during the last 15 years. But does this correspond with a real increase of ethnic conflicts? Or have non-violent conflicts been transformed into violent conflicts? If so, what were the reasons for this transformation?

IV

Investigating the violence of ethnic conflicts

Looking at the different explanations of ethnic conflicts, it is possible to separate three clusters of explanations: the internalists, the controllists and the expandists³¹.

A) Internalists explanations

The internalists explain ethnic conflicts through a clash that occurs because of the very characteristics of majorities and minorities within a state. The difference in this characteristics (might it be their nature, or their social structure, their culture, their language) produce or construct a conflict that in most cases can only be solved through the use violence. Two prominent explanations of the internalists cluster are the biological and the primordial explanation:

- *Biological*: ethnic tensions are somehow “natural”. It is argued that “the urge to define and reject the other goes back to our remotest human ancestors, and indeed beyond them to our animal predecessors.”³² Therefore ethnic groups are rejected by the majority population, just as ethnic groups are rejecting the majority population, which is shown in the conflict. This theory might solve as an explanation why conflicts in general are a natural phenomena– but it doesn't explain the roots of ethnic conflicts and why particular ethnicity is a good vehicle for conflict.

³¹ The three subcategories were developed by me, however some of the explanations inspired by Lipschutz, however he didn't categorize them. Lipschutz, pp. 54-55

³² Bernard Lewis, “Muslims, Christians, and Jews: The Dream of Coexistence,” *New York Review of Books*, 26 March 1992, p. 48. The biological explanation is also exemplified in statements like “People reflexively grasp at ethnic or national identifications or what passes for them.” James B. Rule, “Tribalism and the State,” *Dissent*, Fall, 1992, p. 519.

- *Primordial*: ethnic conflicts occur “from accumulated hatred in primordial ‘nations’ ”³³. Through the break-up of political institutions and the disappearance of repressive mechanisms (with special regard to the ethnic conflicts in former Soviet satellite states like Yugoslavia after the end of the Cold War), these accumulated hatreds are erupting and produce violent ethnic conflicts. This might explain why some ethnic conflicts are terminated by repressive mechanism – or it does give a hint why sometimes ethnic conflicts don’t occur: because the chance that the ethnic conflict is successful for the ethnic minority is diminished because of repressive mechanisms. However, considering that ethnic conflicts not only occur after the break-up of repressive political system, and second, not all repressive states with ethnic minorities have experienced violent ethnic conflicts after their disintegration, this theory seems hardly sufficient for a general explanation for ethnic conflicts.

In general, internalists explain why ethnic conflicts are possible – but not why they are happening. The internalists forget about the motivation of the actors in ethnic conflicts. These are taken more into consideration by the controllists and the expandists.

B) Controllists explanations

Ethnic conflicts are explained by the controllists through the aim of a majority population to stabilize their societal order and increase the benefits that this societal order is bringing for the majority population. Ethnic conflicts are therefore the result of the majority population to control the situation and stay in power. Two examples of controllists explanations are the defensive and the offensive explanations.

- *Defensive*: states use ethnicity or ethnic minorities in order to defend their own status and legitimize their existence. “Historically states have been defined largely in terms of the territory they occupy and the resources and populations they control. Hence the state must of necessity impose clearly defined borders between itself and other states. To do this, the state must plausibly demonstrate that the identities of other states and groups pose a threat to its specific emergent ‘nation.’ ”³⁴ Thus the majority population will form their own group identity and separate dissimilar identities, therefore distinctly point out ethnic minorities and their differences.
- *Offensive*: states, or rather the elite of a majority population, are using the ethnic minority to keep the benefits they have or increase them even

³³ Lipschutz, p. 54

³⁴ Lipschutz, p. 55

further. Therefore, they pass legislation which discriminates ethnic minorities politically and culturally and/or aims at diminishing the economic status of the ethnic minority.³⁵

Both theories suggest that the ethnic conflict occurs out of the reaction of the ethnic minority towards the actions undertaken by the majority population to control their power.

Yet, one must ask: how is an ethnic conflict possible in a situation where these discriminating actions are not taken by the majority? The conflict between the Albanians and the Macedonians is such an example: the Albanians were given political rights (parliamentary veto on issues concerning them), language (like an university with lessons primary in Albanian) and cultural rights – yet the conflict is very hard to control, there is still a strong and violent Albanian movement for separation from Macedonia, and only, it seems, the NATO mission “Amber Fox” has - maybe only temporarily - calmed down the conflict.

Furthermore, if there’s a direct causal connection between intentional discrimination by a majority, thus creating on the one side benefits for the majority, and on the other side, risking ethnic conflicts, than the gains must be far higher than the risks. In other words, the benefits must surpass the danger of a possible latent, probably violent ethnic conflict. In a short term, it makes sense – but seen in the long term a latent ethnic conflict would actually destabilize a society. Therefore in the long-term the intentional triggering of ethnic conflicts will not be benefiting for the majority.

Nevertheless, although the controllists explanations doesn’t seem to be completely coherent to the ethnic conflict situation, they point to an important aspect: the power relation between majority and ethnic minority can invigorate or deteriorate ethnic conflicts. The question remains: who is initializing them? This question was tried to be answered by the expandists.

C) Expandists explanations

Expandists claim that ethnic conflicts are rooted in the desire of ethnic minorities (or members of ethnic minorities) to gain or expand their benefits. In this view, the ethnic identity is used to strengthen these claims and give legitimization to it. Among the expandists explanations, there is considerable differences about the motivations for such claims, I will try to exemplify the

³⁵ This theory is often promoted when discussing Western or American politics regarding the Israel-Palestine-conflict (e.g. Noam Chomsky’s book “Open Wound Middle-East/Offene Wunde Naher Osten”, Europa Verlag, 2002), yet by the same people strongly rejected regarding the conflicts in the Balkans - especially the NATO-politics in the Kosovo conflict – where it is argued that the discrimination of the ethnic minorities were highly exaggerated (e.G. Noam Chomsky’s book “People Without Rights“, Europa Verlag 2002). Without commenting whether or not the usually attached criticisms concerning capitalism and Western politics are correct, such views on ethnic minority situations are not very consistent.

general idea by talking about the imaginal and instrumental explanation of ethnic conflicts.

- *Imaginal*: ethnic consciousness is the “intellectual project”³⁶ of a highly-educated elite, which is located in the political, economical and often geographical periphery of a state, and yet excluded from political and economical power within the state. This elite promotes ethnicity in order to establish a high-culture opposing the high culture of the political center. Therefore an ethnicity is only an “imagined community”³⁷.

It is questionable, whether the desire for such an alternative high-culture would a) create an ethnic identity and b) stimulating an ethnic conflict because the elite must be rather powerful to impose an ethnic identity and even an ethnic conflict on the main part of an ethnic minority.

Nevertheless, theory does identify possible actors or stimulators in an ethnic conflict – the elites in an ethnic minority.

- *Instrumental*: Ethnic conflicts arise out of the desire of ethnic minorities to claim benefits that they either realistically or allegedly don't have. It aims at gaining power and thus changing the power relations between minority and majority. Furthermore, instrumentalists argue that “ethnicity is the result of projects designed to capture state power and control”³⁸. Additionally, they claim, all characteristics usually attached to ethnicity (culture, language, religion, customs and traditions) only exist because of this struggle for power.

Some instrumentalists claim that “the role of ethnicity is to enforce coalition membership [in the] competition for economy's resources”³⁹. Ethnic conflicts are the result of the struggle for economic gains.

Even further, some instrumentalists⁴⁰ argue that economic globalization, asking for the opening of markets for goods and capital, has decreased the ability of states to control and benefit from economic processes. However, this control was needed to uphold social contracts between different groups in a society – but because of globalization, these contracts become invalid or broken. Consequently, struggles for power occur in societies where these social contracts do not exist. If the past social contracts were built along the lines of ethnic criteria, then it is possible for “modern political entrepreneurs to mobilize support around ethnic [...] identities.”⁴¹

³⁶, cf. Anderson

³⁷ ibid

³⁸ Lipschutz, p. 55

³⁹ Caselli, Preface

⁴⁰ Lipschutz, pp. 4-5 (of course more detailed in the whole book)

⁴¹ Lipschutz, p. 5

Two things seem to be debatable: first, why should an ethnicity only be constructed because of a struggle for power? As I have argued in the first chapter, there are many reasons why ethnic identity is a strong category, even though it is prone to change. I would go even further, ethnic identity is a normal part in the process of identifying with larger groups. The theory that ethnic identities are only existing because of power struggles seems not sufficient enough. However, it is clear that this ethnic identity can be politically utilized for various means.

Second, it is unclear whether the economic globalization is such a strong catalyst for ethnic conflicts. Many scholars argue, that economic globalization and their effects are exaggerated and overestimated. According to them, states are still capable of shaping the global economic developments.⁴²

Others point out that states are undergoing transformations in which their role changes: they have to arrange their political and economic power on the international and suprastate level, while at the same time the substate level gains importance.⁴³ This would underline the fact that there are power shifts within states, and thus struggles for power. But if it constitutes as much to the existences of ethnic minorities as some instrumentalists believe, is doubtful.

The general theme of expandists is: ethnic conflicts occur because they are either in the interest of the ethnic minority – or in the interest of a fraction of the ethnic minority, if only the political elite.

Implicitly this theory states that ethnic minorities are to blame for ethnic conflicts, which is questionable as well. Nevertheless, the responsibility of ethnic groups in ethnic conflicts must be taken into account.

D) All-inclusive approach

It becomes obvious, neither of the three mentioned approaches give a comprehensive explanation for violent ethnic conflicts. Instead, it is much better to develop criteria of when and how ethnic conflicts occur.

First criteria, there must be a strong ethnic group identity, otherwise the actors of such a conflict can not utilize the ethnic minority.

The existence of such an ethnic identity has to be beneficial towards the members of the ethnic group (for instance through mutual support among the ethnic group), because logically a successful ethnic conflict will strengthen the existence of an ethnic group. If the existence of the ethnic group is not beneficial

⁴² cf. Thompson

⁴³ cf. McGrew

for its members before the ethnic conflict, it will most likely not be beneficial afterwards.

Furthermore, the ethnic identity must be beneficial for the majority population (for instance if the majority population welcomes cultural diversity) – otherwise the majority population will try to suppress the ethnic identity in such a way that either the ethnic identity becomes disadvantageous (e.g. through repressive mechanisms) or irrelevant (through cultural assimilation).

Second criteria, there must be considerable political power shifts within the society in which the ethnic group is a minority. These power shifts can be attributed to global, national or regional processes.

Furthermore, for an ethnic minority the power situation must seem to improve after an ethnic conflict, or in other words, the outlook on the new power relations must be a positive.

And the power shift can not be in the interest of the majority population. If for instance, like it was in Czechoslovakia in the beginning of the 90ies, the power shift is in the interest of both ethnic groups (the Czech and the Slovaks, which were taken together the majority population), then power will be divided without an ethnic conflict.

Third criteria, there must be real (or commonly assumed) economical or political differences which are hoped to be overcome by the ethnic conflict.

If an ethnic minority perceptibly has the same economic and political status as the majority population, then an ethnic conflict will not happen (like it is the case with the Sorbs in Germany or the Friesians in Netherlands).

Even worse, if an ethnic minority would lose economical status due to an ethnic conflict, then an ethnic conflict is even more unlikely (this is the case with the Sami people in northern Finland – they might gain political independence but lose financial support from the rest of Finland)

Only if these criteria are met to a large extent, then a violent ethnic conflict is possible to happen. Now it is necessary to have a look at the solutions that the international state community offers and has offered towards violent ethnic conflicts – and see if the solutions were appropriate measures to deal with diminishing one of the criteria for violent ethnic conflicts.

V

Global responses to global ethnic violence

One thing has to be said right away: there is no established global strategy of struggling with violence in ethnic conflicts – and unfortunately in the future, there probably won't be one response or not even one common approach.

The situations of ethnic conflicts are too different, the power relations between states and minorities are too disparate, the interests in ethnic conflicts are too strong and varied among the international community and the international institutions are yet too weak to balance these interests.

Yet much efforts are being taken towards such global responses. This effort is motivated through a change of structure in group violence in the 20th century. After the Westphalian Peace of 1648, violence shifted from violence between religions to violence between sovereign nation-states.

In the 20th century, after World War II, violence shifted gradually from violence between states towards violence between ideological systems (Cold War and its substitute wars in Africa, South and Central America, Central and South East Asia).

Then in the 90ies, violence experienced its last transformation: now violence between cultural or political groups became more frequent. Still, states (allegedly) represent certain political groups, therefore violence of political or cultural groups is directed against states or symbols of states (like the terrorist attacks of September 11th show). States reply by attacking states which again (allegedly) represent these political groups, like the war in Afghanistan and Iraq shows.

Since a lot of states are facing the threat of becoming an aim for attacks by cultural groups, the search for global responses has increased, yet still reflecting the power relations among the states - with the USA as dominant actor in this discussion.

Concerning violence in ethnic conflicts, three approaches of the international community⁴⁴ can be differentiated:

“Pro State“-Approach: the international community has either directly or indirectly initiated politics that were aimed at strengthening the role of states in ethnic conflicts. This was done either through ignoring ethnic conflicts (like the

⁴⁴ With international community I refer to the United Nations and their agencies like the International Labor Organization (ILO) or the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to the NATO, OECD, European Union, OPEC and other political, military or economical international organizations and supranational institutions, and to collective efforts, like the recently established US-led Alliance of states against terrorism.

ethnic conflict in the Russian province Chechenya is – except for occasional moral statements – largely ignored) or by supporting the state through military interventions (e.g. the conflict in Macedonia. NATO troops were sent to help the state establish conflict resolution procedures with the Albanians).

“Pro Ethnic“-Approach: the international community has intervened with political and military means in ethnic conflicts, several times on behalf of the ethnic minority. The direct military intervention has led to a separation between the ethnic minority and the majority – like the case of the Kosovo conflict shows: the NATO intervened and created a de facto autonomous territory, currently governed in a joint cooperation of Kosovo-Albanian and international politics. The future status is currently debated within the international community – however it is unlikely that the Kosovo region will be merged again with Serbia.

“Individual and Collective Rights“-Approach: the international community, especially the United Nations and their agencies, has agreed on many conventions strengthening the collective rights of ethnic groups and the individual rights of their members. Based on the fundamental individual rights laid down in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”⁴⁵

This is specified in the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*: “States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity. [...] Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities [...] have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination.”⁴⁶

In Europe, the *Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* links individual and collective rights: “The protection of national minorities and of the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to those minorities forms an integral part of the international protection of human rights [...]”⁴⁷

When evaluating these approaches, the international community was successful in ending ethnic conflicts when the struggle for power was halted – either through creating a political territory in which the ethnic minority became the

⁴⁵ UDHR, Article 2

⁴⁶ DRERLM, Article 1, 2

⁴⁷ CPNM, Article 1

majority population (like in Kosovo) , or in promoting conflict solutions in which power relations between the minority and the majority were set fixed for a temporary period (like in Macedonia).

However, the international community failed at resolving ethnic conflicts in which the vested interests of the different states are too diverged. The Israel-Palestinian conflict is such an example, where the interests of the United States and the Arabic countries are yet too strong to promote a conflict solution.

The international community fails also in resolving ethnic conflicts that exist at the periphery of the world affairs. Mainly ethnic conflicts in Africa are not resolved because the international community doesn't get involved as much as in the conflicts on the Balkans, for example. The focus of the international community is set on the conflicts which are closer or more relevant to the interests of the big stakeholders (USA, Western European states) in international affairs.

The approach of establishing a set of rights given to groups and individuals has had three effects

- it has strengthened the role of individuals towards their ethnic group
- it has strengthened the role of individuals from an ethnic group towards their state
- it has strengthened the role of ethnic groups towards their state

While the first two effects are positive in resolving ethnic conflicts – the third effect can lead to a possible ethnic conflict if it is overdone. The international community is successful at resolving ethnic conflicts if individual rights are strengthened, but is likely to cause ethnic conflicts if the individual rights are strongly connected with the collective rights of ethnic minorities.

Instead, as I will discuss in the next and last chapter, it is much better to replace collective rights by more defined and detailed individual rights.

VI

Group vs. individual rights

In sociological and political theory the relation between individual and state is often discussed. The common view is that individuals in societies have rights, which protects them from the rules imposed by the society, and duties towards the society and especially towards the other individuals in the group. The state, in contrast, has to guarantee these rights and demand that the citizen fulfill their duties.

In the modern world however, individuals are also seen as members of groups or collectives, and therefore “alongside the principle that individuals are

right-and-duty-bearing units, a comparable principle should be accepted for the benefit of ethnic communities.”⁴⁸ This is political reality, as shown in the examples given in chapter III, as well as politically desired, as shown by the conventions mentioned in chapter IV.

In addressing why it makes more sense to replace most of the collective rights with defined individual rights, it's not implied that these collectives don't exist. “Individuals invariably find themselves members of groups or associations which not only influence their conduct but also shape their loyalties and their sense of identity.”⁴⁹ As I have shown in the very first chapter, it makes much sense why these collectives were formed and are existing. Yet, I am skeptic whether the sheer existence of such groups legitimate the “attachment of fundamental moral claims”⁵⁰ to the membership in such groups.

One doubt I have expressed earlier: cultural groups and especially ethnic groups are constructed and therefore not eternally set – the ongoing contact to other groups initiate modifications within the culture, even if these might occur very slowly. Ethnic groups are “mutable historical formations”⁵¹ because culture is interactive⁵².

Furthermore, ethnicity is contextual. Ethnic identity gains importance in historical political, cultural and economical contexts – when the strengthening of group identity is beneficial to strengthen certain claims that the members of such a group have.

In promoting collective rights for ethnic minorities, it is argued that these rights protect the cultural autonomy⁵³ of the individual members of ethnic minorities. Therefore it is reasonable to protect as well the cultural autonomy of ethnic groups – despite their ability to change - by granting collective rights to the group. The groups interest to gain and keep these collective rights is acceptable because it represent the sum of the member's interests in these rights.

However, it is questionable if this last equation is true. Most groups are not as homogenous as it seems – and especially ethnic minorities have considerable conflicts of interests within their group. The dilemma is the divergent interests of elites and the interests of the majority group within ethnic minorities. The process

⁴⁸ Van Dyke, p. 363

⁴⁹ Kukathas, p. 232. The following arguments pro and contra cultural rights are mainly taken from Chandran Kukathas essay “Are there any Cultural Rights?” in which he develops a liberal theory which does not include cultural rights given to groups.

⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵¹ Kukathas, p. 234

⁵² Horowitz, p. 73

⁵³ Kukathas, p.241

of defining ethnic identity and claiming cultural rights, mixes the ethnic elites with the elites of the majority population. Consequently, “the interests of the minority elite become further removed from those of their cultural community [...] – [they only] share a common interest in the symbolic standing of the group as a whole”⁵⁴ and it is always the case the interests of groups equate the interests of all their members.

In addition to that, most ethnic minorities do just the opposite of giving as much possible cultural autonomy to their members⁵⁵. The strengthening of ethnic identity often results in cultural pressure on individuals to accept customs and language, through claiming for and establishing ethnic educational systems, these groups are quite successful in reproducing their ethnicity and its characteristics – something that inconsistent with individual cultural autonomy.

This wouldn't be tragic if cultural groups – and especially ethnic minorities - would be voluntary associations, like a soccer club, a political party or a worker's union. Voluntary associations incorporate one fundamental right: the individual can leave the association whenever he or she wants.

However, most ethnic minorities are not voluntary associations. “Membership is usually determined by birth rather than by deliberate choice, and in many cases, there is no option of entry for those born outside.”⁵⁶

These three above-mentioned reasons suggest that defense of collective cultural rights not guarantee the cultural autonomy of individuals. In order to strengthen the individual cultural autonomy and as an alternative to using the detour of collective cultural rights, I suggest it would be better to give extended and defined cultural rights to the individual members of the group.

Most of the rights demanded by ethnic minorities could well be replaced through individual rights. The individual right to maintain a culture, to practice certain customs, traditions, holidays, folklore will make it possible for ethnic minorities to do so as well – because individuals could join each other in practicing these customs.

If individuals would get the right to receive part of their education in their mother-tongue (or in any language they wish) and the right to choose their educational institution, it would help ethnic minorities to establish educational institutions in which the ethnic culture can be sustained - without forcing ethnic individuals minorities into these educational institutions.

⁵⁴ Kukathas, p. 235

⁵⁵ Kukathas, p. 242

⁵⁶ Kukathas, p. 238

If individuals would be able to maintain local media, then ethnic minorities could create their own local ethnic television, radio and newspapers.

If individuals had the right that official documents and administrative forms are also available in the language of the individual, if linguistic support in administrative paper work is given to individuals, then the necessity for demanding the own language as official language becomes irrelevant.

The same approach can be used for the claim to political rights made by ethnic minorities. Individuals of an ethnic minority have, like all individuals, the right to form associations and unions in which one or many aspects of their ethnicity is the central term of association.

Then these (now voluntarily formed) associations can be included in a normal process of stakeholder dialogue. Public government through the participation of the public – which includes the associations formed by members of the ethnic minority – will make power-sharing possible.

If individuals are given possibilities, through methods of direct democracy, to influence directly government politics, then ethnic minorities can directly influence government politics as well.

If the political system of a state is so well-balanced, that majority rule is not dominant rule, then ethnic minorities will be able to play a part in the government process – however this well-balanced system is a claim derived from the interest of an individual to an effective, yet democratic form of government.

Not necessarily all collective rights given to cultural groups like ethnic minorities can be simply replaced by redefining and specifying individual rights, but the process of replacement itself will lead to an alternation in the structure of ethnic identity – the initiative for ethnic identity will come from the individuals, not from the group.

At the same time, ethnic conflict is less likely to happen because the individual rights have universal and egalitarian character – and not divisional character like collective cultural rights.

Thus is the solution to the global ethnic paradigm- altering the structure of ethnic identity by strengthening the rights of individuals.

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