Part One

The Context:

Political, Adminstrative and Legal Perspectives

Minorities and Democracy

George Schöpflin

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The central issue is this—how can the modern democratic state come to terms with its own diversity, with the very diversity that democracy produces, and not fall apart while simultaneously providing for the expression of that diversity?

Democracy

There are various answers. In the first place, democracy is made democratic by basing its rule on the consent of those governed. The means for articulating that consent and feeding into the system of governance is the concept of popular sovereignty. There must also be a system of institutions for transmitting the will of the people to the rulers, together with a readiness on the part of the rulers to translate popular aspirations into policy. These might be termed inclusive means. Equally, there are instruments for excluding certain ideas, options, actions and pressures. Some of these instruments are explicit, like legal regulation, and others are implicit and informal, encoded in cultural givens. And some are physical, material, technological, economic, etc.

Language is one of the most self-evident ways of including and excluding. People who speak the same language and share the same culture will automatically be closer to one another and have the sense that they can rely on fellow members of the language community to understand them without further explanation. But language is seldom enough on its own. There have to be factors like shared history, memory and ways of life for communities of solidarity to come together. Note that speakers of the same language in the philological sense do not automatically constitute a community of solidarity. Thus speakers of English understand each other more readily, but their communities of solidarity are quite different—English, American, Irish, etc.

Under conditions of modernity, which in politics means continuous change, expanding choice and increasing complexity, the central institution for sustaining order and coherence is the state. The state comprises the entire set of institutions controlled by the elected authorities, the machinery of administration, central, regional and local levels of government, plus various state and semi-state agencies, as well as the judiciary, procuracy and other bodies involved in the administration of justice. Parliaments and elected local councils are notionally semi-autonomous of the state; in practice, they are in con-

tinuous interaction with it. Government agencies may be also semi-autonomous of it, in that they depend for their legality and legitimacy, as well as their budgets, on the state, but can act with extensive discretion. Nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) are notionally fully independent of the state, but will normally be in continuous interaction with it and will be structured by that interaction; NGOs which receive some or all of their funding from the state may also have a status that is more autonomous than that of government agencies.

Then, there is an important distinction to be made between democracy and consent to be ruled. A system may be consensual in the sense that its rulers are elected democratically, meaning that the electorate has consented to their being in power. But if the rulers' power is not exercised according to the principles of democracy—self-limitation, commitment, moderation, compromise, responsibility—it will not be democratic. This split between democratic sanction for power, which is often exercised undemocratically or semi-democratically, is characteristic of many of the post-communist states.

The State

It is vital to recognise a number of real, as distinct from formal, features of the state. In the first place, the state, like any other political actor, operates by adhering to a set of rules and does so supposedly in strict terms, thereby ensuring transparency, consistency and accountability. Hence following procedures and accounting for budgets are essential in maintaining a responsive relationship between the citizens and the state. The professionalism of the administrators, their training and socialisation, is another safeguard against the exercise of arbitrary power. Respect for the rule of law is vital.

However, given the complexity and extent of the tasks that the state has to resolve, it is impossible to make advance provision for all the contingencies that the state administration must deal with. Hence the agents of the state are entrusted with a considerable degree of discretion and they are supposed to exercise this within their formal and informal terms of reference. This requires them to act according to the doctrine of self-limitation, to accept feedback and to recognise a wider public good in acting in conformity to the dictates of consistency. In real political terms, the result is that the agencies of the state can arrogate power to themselves, leaving the citizen with only few resources to resist, particularly when judicial remedies are restricted.

The agencies of the state and their personnel are, therefore, political actors, even when their power is relatively restricted, and should act in a democratic way, guided by democratic values. When they do not, that power is to some extent discredited. Citizens will be reluctant to rely on it and will prefer to make their own private arrangements with it. This can take the form of various types of informality like corruption or the personalisation of power, when individuals prefer to deal with agents of the state known to them, rather than rely on the impersonal norms by which the state is supposed to abide.

True democracy, then, requires that there be a widely acknowledged sense of public good and an impersonal public sphere, impersonal in the sense that all citizens are treated evenhandedly by it and there are clear and effective remedies against abuses of power. But this desirable state of affairs is hard to establish and demands constant vigilance by

all political actors, inside the state machinery and outside it (i.e. civil society), to monitor such abuses. And all actors have to accept that they may themselves stray into arbitrariness.

There is a particularly complex problem of the interlocking nature of the relationship between the state, language and modernity. Under conditions of modernity, the state is the pivotal agency of establishing and maintaining coherence and stability. All societies aim to create coherence; coherence provides a stable moral order and the set of shared meanings that lets individuals feel that they are members of a collectivity rather than mere individuals disconnected from the world they live in.

At the same time, modernity also demands very high levels of successful communication in order to secure state-driven coherence. This creates an expectation for the state to be monolingual. This means, further, that there is a qualitative difference between 'language' in general and the 'language of the state'. The language of a state has the prestige and power that the state has created. All languages have the potential to be developed into state languages and thus acquire the political power that is encoded in such a language, but comparatively few actually succeed in this. Crucially, it is vital to distinguish between the philological quality of language and the political. This distinction is frequently overlooked and ignoring it can contribute materially to the disempowerment of linguistic minorities.

Arbitrariness

The arbitrary power of the state is a worldwide phenomenon, and the institutions, instruments and culture of democracy are notionally the most effective means of making the state responsive to the aspirations of the citizens. In this connection, however, it should be clearly understood under modernity that the state itself has an interest in being responsive to society. If the state pursues a largely arbitrary course and ignores public opinion, it will generate both active and passive opposition or, in extreme cases, violent resistance. Furthermore, all the evidence points in the direction of the proposition that the central *raison d'etre* of the state, the maintenance of a monopoly of coercion and taxation, are achieved most efficiently when the citizens consent to this monopoly. Without such consent, therefore, the state is captured by its own bureaucratic norms and becomes incapable of discharging its tasks of sustaining order and coherence, because it cannot cope with simultaneous change and complexity. This, in effect, was the fate of the ultra-bureaucratic and hyper-etatistic communist systems. They collapsed under the weight of their own disorder and incoherence.

Order and Diversity

Thus the modern democratic state has, in effect, two irreconcilable tasks—to sustain order and to permit the articulation of ever more fragmented, disparate, differentiated aspirations; the integration of these two tasks is the criterion of success. In this context, there will never be a perfect solution to the key political issues of democracy at this time, only

more or less acceptable ones. Hence it becomes vital to provide space for remedies, and that, in turn, requires that the state and those exercising power should have the necessary self-awareness and flexibility to respond to pressure. Equally, while the power of the state must be circumscribed, it should neither be excessively constrained nor fragmented. Crucial in this connection is that the state should be perceived as legitimate, a process that is sustained both by the actions of the state and that of society.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy is not automatic. All political actors, the state included, have to earn legitimacy by being responsive to the needs of the citizens; citizens as actors have to abide by the law and apply self-limitation to their activities. This is a counsel of perfection, of course, because it is impossible for all actors, especially the state, to meet the individual demands of each and every citizen.

The solution is to create predictability by following routines and procedures and to exercise discretion with care. Accountability must also be made clear, balanced and predictable. There must be proper procedures for calling political actors to account for their decisions and equally actors must be protected from trivial or frivolous attacks on their work. Note that both 'trivial' and 'frivolous' are culturally determined and will differ in time and place.

If a system is generally disliked by the bulk of the population and if that dislike is expressed in the open, then over time the self-confidence of political actors is eroded. The severe criticism of the public sector in the United Kingdom in the 1980s, coupled with far-reaching privatisation, clearly lowered the morale of those working there. In the longer term, a ruler who no longer feels that he has the support of the population will find it difficult to discharge his tasks or to do it very effectively, with the result that the self-legitimation of the entire system may be called into a question and a process of erosion will be under way. The institution in question, and it may be a state, will be seen as irrelevant or as a distraction; what it says will be ignored. Russia was in this situation for much of the 1990s.

State Collapse

There is, furthermore, a particular and generally undiagnosed problem with respect to the post-communist state. When communism collapsed in 1989-1991, it was not merely communism as an ideology that disintegrated, but so too did the communist state. Whatever the legitimacy of that state, it was a real entity in as much as it did provide a degree of order and coherence that was seen as 'normal and natural' by the bulk of the population. Its institutions may have been regarded as facades, and the levels of arbitrariness and informality that they sustained were certainly incompatible with anything remotely resembling democracy.

Nevertheless, they had established themselves, had become routinised and were to that extent accepted. The collapse of communism eliminated the key principle on which

these states rested and on which their integrative power depended. Hence the end of communism brought into being political formations that had to re-establish their authority and to find new raw materials for their *raison d'etre*. Classically in Europe, as we have seen, this is derived from the state, from civil society and from ethnicity. Given the absence of civil society (destroyed under communism) and the weakness of the state (disintegrated after the collapse), the purposiveness of politics and social-cultural coherence came to depend heavily on ethnicity.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a widely used (and abused) term. In essence, it refers to a group that defines itself as a community of solidarity and identity, with a sense of its past and future, a shared set of meanings and a web of symbolic and mythic markers. Ethnic communities mark themselves off from other groups by various boundary mechanisms, of which language, territory and religion are the most significant, though not sufficient conditions. Ethnicity functions both at the explicit, overt level of meanings, and equally at the tacit, implicit level through the encoding of assumptions that members of a community accept without further questioning. While the codes of solidarity that ethnic groups generate vary enormously, the actual fact of ethnicity is universal. All human beings share in these codes at some level—the language they speak ensures this—and to that extent they all have ethnicity.

Although many in the West deny that their actions are in any way affected by ethnicity, this denial does not have to be taken at face value. Rather, the denial is a part of the assumption that European values are universal, something that has been one of the central tenets of European thought since the Enlightenment. In this perspective, what are defined as universal human values are regarded as ethically superior to those seen as particularistic. In reality, all universalisms are coloured to a greater or lesser extent by codes of ethnic solidarity. In this sense, French civic values are not only civic but also French and so on. The problem of ethnic exclusion or violence, therefore, is not ethnicity as such, but the presence or absence of other, countervailing ideas, values and institutions, like civil society and civic values, that delimit the exclusivist functioning of ethnicity

Modernity

With the coming of modernity in the 18TH century, and the steady growth of the reordering and integrative power of the modern state, ethnicity has become politicised. Ethnic groups have concluded that in order to ensure their uninterrupted cultural reproduction—the ultimate purposiveness of all groups—they must gain access to political power. Most commonly, this is the state, which thereby becomes the nation-state. However, various types of arrangements short of state independence also exist, which can—at any rate for a period of time—satisfy the needs and aspirations of ethnic communities. The autonomous arrangements for Catalonia, Scotland and the different regions of Belgium illustrate this.

One particular quality of ethnicity that has to be addressed is that when it functions without strong institutions and impersonal norms that are accepted by both rulers and ruled, negotiations between one ethnic group and another become extremely problematic. When a group concludes that its survival is challenged, it will be most reluctant to make the compromises that are a necessary element of democratic politics.

Different Meanings of Ethnicity

A further complication is that the term 'ethnicity' is currently used with a variety of different, and not necessarily complementary, meanings. Thus the word can refer to the identity of Third World immigrants to Western Europe, in which case its resonance is positive; to the salient ways of expressing identity under post-communism, in which case it is viewed as negative; and to the ethnic identities to the well-established democratic states of the West, in which case the existence of ethnicity is denied. This results in the kinds of absurdity that gives high value to the ethnicity of, say, Turkish immigrants in Germany but denies that German ethnicity has any value at all. This confusion is relevant to any discussion of issues of multi-ethnicity and multi-culturalism. In broad terms, the ethnicities of long-settled, established European communities tend to be regarded as negative, because they are regarded as sources of majority power and thus, in the eyes of those promoting this kind of discourse, inherently undesirable. This approach is based on the misconception that such disapproval will diminish attachment to majority ethnicity; a more effective way forward is to accept it and make political provision for it.

Multi-culturalism and Multi-ethnicity

There is a considerable amount of confusion about these terms and they tend to be used interchangeably, which adds to the confusion. In reality, they refer to different sociological and political situations. In multi-culturalism, one is dealing with the identities of recently settled populations in another country and the problems of integrating them into the dominant majority. In other words, multi-culturalism applies to immigrants, possibly immigrants of different racial origins, who by immigrating are signalling that in the long term, they or their descendants are ready to adopt the cultural norms of the majority. Crucially, under multi-culturalism there is not expected to be any long-term persistence of the languages that the immigrants bring with them.

Certain cultural traits, like religion, may well be conserved, but the intensity of acculturation and, correspondingly, the degree of separateness between majority and minority is likely to be small. Indeed, the concept of multi-culturalism contains a serious challenge for white majorities—will they be prepared to accept the demand that will certainly arrive on the cultural agenda, that non-whites can be fully accepted as members of the dominant community? For the time being, the answers differ. In some states, like France, the answer is notionally yes, but the terms of full acceptance are harsh—complete acculturation, including the abandonment of all previous cultural traits. Elsewhere, the answers are more ambiguous, as in Britain, roughly implying that the white majority has yet to face up to the question.

Multi-lingualism and multi-ethnicity are qualitatively different, in as much as they explicitly reject the idea of full acculturation and assume that the different language groups will live in the same state and sustain their different languages and cultures. This is a far more difficult state of affairs and requires quite different solutions from multi-culturalism. Above all, it will demand a level of sensitivity and accommodation by both (all) groups to the demands of the others and a readiness to compromise one's own moral and cultural agendas that some will not find palatable. In political terms, this means forms of power sharing, along the lines defined by consociationalism, which accepts and relies on the collective identities of groups as a key political building block (see below).

In practice, it is inconceivable that well-established ethnic minorities, like the Hungarians of Romania or the Russians of Latvia will abandon their languages and moral norms in order to merge into the majority. Nor is it certain that the majority would welcome this. Hence these ethno-linguistic groups constitute separate societies that live in the same political space. The consequence is that the traffic between majority and minority has to be regulated by clear and transparent rules, ones that both accept and, where necessary, challenge. Communication between them is likely to operate at the elite level, and in this context effective elite communication is vital for political stability, while at the street level mutual respect and acceptance of the other are generally sufficient.

Civil Society

The concept of civil society also demands further examination. Currently, 'society' when it is invested with the term 'civil' is widely seen as a possessing the moral high ground, even while it is perfectly clear that certain forms of social activity are evidently immoral (e.g. the oppression of minorities). Hence any analysis of civil society has to be refined to resolve the contradiction. The key here is the role of the state in establishing order and maintaining the rule of law. Where these processes are weak or absent or the state is not trusted, as in many of the post-communist states, society will not be very civil; it will not have any sense of operating under an even-handed set of rules and will, therefore, prefer personal to institutional forms of operation. This makes access to power uneven and bears particularly hard on minorities, social as well as ethnic.

Political actors will not necessarily act by the yardstick of democratic values, but—where the state is not strong enough to enforce the law—will rely instead on clientilistic networks, personal (rather than institutional) trust, favours and hierarchies of power. All these usually overlapping, informal institutions do, indeed, provide an alternative to the civic state and create a restricted security and order that people need in their encounters with power. But such a system is not very efficient or reliable: it perpetuates arbitrariness. Power is opaque and people will see abuses of power whether they are there or not; nor will they see remedies, resulting in frustration and a sense of injustice. Under modernity, there is no adequate alternative to the impersonal state.

Ethnic (and other) minorities will tend to have poorer access to these informal networks because they are in a minority and thus inherently weaker; their negative reaction to the exercise of power will be correspondingly stronger. They will be inclined to see power as being directed against them and will not recognise that the rulers (from the

majority) may also be dealing with the majority ethnic group poorly. A case in point was the Slovak language law of the mid-1990s passed by the Meciar government, which the Hungarian minority saw as aimed at itself and would not accept that the law bore hard on some of the Slovak majority as well.

Post-communism

It should be noted that the present weakness of the state in the post-communist world is exacerbated by an unexpected phenomenon. The current discourse of civil society has evolved out of a Western context, from a need to challenge the strong, well-grounded Western welfare state of the post-1945 era. This discourse tends to see the relationship between civil society and the state as, at best, a zero-sum game and, vitally, it has no theory of the state.

The discourse does not, therefore, try to understand what the state is for, what its positive features and functions are and why sizeable sections of society continue to depend on it materially and culturally. Nor does this attitude like to recognise that civil society and the state are in a mutual relationship—each needs the other to operate effectively. Instead, this discourse dismisses the state as an obstacle to emancipation and does what it can to delegitimate it. This state of affairs tends to perpetuate the weakness and ineffectiveness of the state, even while the state has extensive tasks to discharge, which it consequently does much less well than it should.

The importing of this discourse into the post-communist world, aided as it was by the pre-1989 democratic opposition's anti-etatist perspectives, has resulted in the paradox noted above: that the post-communist state is not strong enough to provide the stabilising framework for civil society; hence society operates along a pattern of informalism, thereby weakening itself. Thus the pattern so common in post-communist societies: they have no pronounced civic sense and are not well able to exercise democratic control over the state and the government. The system is partly consensual, established and self-reproducing; there is no reason to expect any change in this area in the foreseeable future.

Ethnicity and Post-communist Systems

The foregoing should begin to provide an explanation for why ethnicity has come to play such a significant role in the running of post-communist states. It is the preeminent resource for the maintenance of order and coherence and will remain so until the state has acquired the requisite authority to provide the framework for the functioning of civil society. In the interim, where multi-ethnic relations are involved, these can raise questions that go beyond the capacity of the existing conflict resolution mechanisms. When the state and its institutions are not regarded as neutral by all the actors, for example, the police is seen as ethnically biased, minority ethnic groups will find themselves forced to create their own, potentially divergent forms of self-protection, which can come to be seen by the majority as threatening to the integrity of the state.

This has several outcomes. The weakness of the agreed mechanisms for conflict resolution tends to lead to rapid escalation in majority-minority relations; each is inclined to see the activities of the other in the worst light; each sees the other as a single, solid—and, therefore, threatening—block, which then leads them to listen only to the extremists and disregard the diversity of the other. Thereby, it is easy to understand the negative cycles from which it is difficult to escape. However, escape is not impossible, merely difficult. No community actually wants to live in a state of tension and if the elites can find an effective minimum basis for communication, de-escalation is feasible. Northern Ireland is a case where accommodation has proved all but impossible; Estonia offers a more positive picture.

Moral Worth

Central to any community's sense of itself in the modern world is that it is accepted by others, especially by its direct competitors, as a community of moral worth. While others may not share its particular combination of values and ideals, let alone its symbolic system, it is vital for collective self-esteem that a community be accepted by others on equal terms. What is very significant in this connection in the modern world is that all cultures seek acceptance as high cultures; indeed, there is a close nexus between political power and possessing a high culture, with all the necessary paraphernalia of language, vocabulary and density of meanings that allows a cultural community to compete on equal terms. Crucially, political demands—whether within a state or internationally—have to be articulated in a universally acceptable form. This means possessing the right kind of high cultural vocabulary that modernity demands.

However, when two cultures are competing for power within the same state, the majority will find such political contests very difficult to tolerate, given the close association between cultural power, state power and political power. It is this collision that makes the rights of ethnic minorities so difficult to regulate in a democratic way. Probably the most successful form of such regulation is consociationalism, which provides the necessary political power for all the cultural communities in the same etatic space and the means for resolving political contests.

Consociational systems explicitly recognise that the power of the state depends on all the ethnic groups that live there. Power has to be shared and exercised proportionately between them. In practical terms, consociational systems (Belgium, Switzerland, Finland, South Tyrol) depend on the idea of a coalition in which all groups are represented, on elite cooperation, on proportional access to the material and symbolic goods of the state by all groups, on the right of veto by all groups on matters that affect their most vital interests and, it should be added, that all the ethnic communities are committed to the territorial integrity of the state.

It is crucial in such systems that contests for political power, which are a normal part of every political system, can be expressed in such a way as to avoid ethnic polarisation, which spills very readily into ethnicisation, a situation where everything—all initiatives, moves and decisions—are read in ethnic terms and only in ethnic terms. In such situations, the 'public good' or civic sphere, that ought to attach to the state and transcend eth-

nicities, does not do so. Switzerland is an illustration of a successful case, as is Finland; Northern Ireland is an example of the opposite.

State Integrity

The problem of the integrity of the state is not as straightforward as it appears at first sight. On the face of it, this concept refers to the integrity of state territory and seeks to impose a general interdict on the fragmentation or disintegration of states. It implies that once a state has come into being, it is there forever—that there is a moral purposiveness in state integrity—and, hence, anything that threatens it is to be condemned and may, therefore, be combated. However, in the real world of politics, the configuration of states undergoes constant change and it is only from the unusual perspective of 1945-1989, when state boundaries remained extraordinarily stable, that this appearance of changelessness arose. Most European states have been involved in some kind of major or minor boundary change in the 20TH century. At the same time, such change is deeply disliked by states and thus by the international order, which has adopted this position.

There are several factors which help to explain this conservatism. In the first place, the state has a tacit function as the final repository of rationality, so that the questioning of the state is a challenge to rationality itself. Second, when a state is rearranged, this causes far-reaching upheaval, as the new state—the state within its new frontiers—has to impose its particular order on the newly acquired territory. Germany after reunification is a good example. Third, new states give rise to greater complexity in the international order, which is disliked by the existing beneficiaries of the system, as it means accepting new entrants. Foreign ministries, which have established their own routines, networks of information, contacts and other forms of cultural capital, are reluctant to accept that their hard-won knowledge has become useless in the new circumstances. This conservatism was acutely visible during the crisis that led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, when Western states were most uneasy with the idea that Yugoslavia as a state and as an aspiration had lost the consent of the majority of the people who lived there. Indeed, the hesitations of the West contributed to the ensuing chaos. Fourth, given the foregoing, reconfiguring the state order (new states, new frontiers) is generally difficult and is often the outcome of upheaval. While it is usually the outcome of upheaval and not necessarily the cause of it, in popular perceptions the two are often confounded. Fifth, as the modern state has been entrusted with the maintenance of order and coherence, any challenge to it is deeply disturbing—when states are faced with collapse or fragmentation, it as if a part of the natural world had suddenly changed, it seems inexplicable and is profoundly threatening. If an alternative source of order is not available, those affected will be vulnerable to extremist mobilisation, as happened to the Serbs of Bosnia in 1992.

Ethnic Minorities

All this inevitably impacts on ethnic minorities, because majorities can seek to present their claims for political power as a threat to the international order and the territorial

integrity of the state and find a ready audience. On the other hand, the evolution of the European order in the 1990s has to some extent confronted this problem by giving minorities an international audience, a space within which they can articulate their demands, without the automatic assumption that they are seeking secession. Through the Council of Europe, the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as a host of international NGOs, ethnic minorities have acquired the space to address international public opinion directly, while simultaneously there is a consensus that the classical, strict definition of state has been considerably diluted. The international community has in effect declared that the welfare of ethnic minorities is the concern of the entire community.

Territory

Particular attention should be paid in this connection to the role of territory. Historically, there was a direct equation between territory and power; the more territory a state controlled, the more powerful it was thought to be. Elements of this kind of thinking survive, although in power terms, territory is far less important than it was. Power nowadays resides in information, in ideas, in ability to manipulate concepts and to persuade others to act, rather than force them to do so. The consensual exercise of power, which this shift betokens, is far more effective—far better at condensing and accumulating power—than the power that grows out of the barrel of a gun.

Nevertheless, this does not signify that territory has lost all significance in the exercise of power and especially in the context of power in inter-ethnic relations. Despite globalisation and despite the loss of power by the state (as traditionally measured), territory continues to play a key role at the concrete level, as well as at the symbolic one. Communities structure their identities around myths of territory and project this onto a concrete piece of land. In this sense, territory has a dual function in the politics of identity—it establishes and expresses a particular community and it gives it wider recognition, as well as endowing it with the space in real terms that it can regard as its own.

In an indirect way, communities weigh one another's worth by their being communities of territory. This makes it especially difficult for nonterritorial groups, like the Roma, to gain the recognition they are seeking. Equally, when two or more groups share the same territory and invest it with special symbolic significance, the arrangement of inter-ethnic relations will be highly intractable, though not completely so.

This points to another facet of the role of territory in inter-ethnic relations. Each community tends to regard its territory—its mythic territory—as its monopoly possession. When the mythic territory coincides with the boundaries of the state, there is no serious difficulty; but when there is no such coincidence, the conflict of concrete and mythic can become very complex indeed to negotiate. Inter-ethnic relations in Romania, where both Romanians and Hungarians invest Transylvania with a mythic function of this nature, is an example of this kind of contest.

Myths and Symbols

All this raises the thorny issue of the role of myths and symbols in politics in general and in the politics of inter-ethnic relations in particular. In a good deal of the literature on this area, there is no serious analysis of the role of symbols; reference may be made to that role, but it is not examined in any depth. This can result in the underestimation of the impact and importance of symbolic-mythic processes. The most persuasive way of looking at these processes, then, is to see the concrete and the symbolic as being in a continuous, interactive relationship, that when the institutional and procedural forms of power are well grounded, the role of symbols stays in the background, though it would be a mistake to imagine that they disappear entirely.

All communities—ethnic, civic, other—depend on myth and symbol to screen in certain ideas, propositions, meanings and to exclude others. By doing so, communities create an order, a way of seeing the world that is particular and proper to them and them alone. These meanings are then made 'normal and natural' by that particular community.

Communities construct narratives about themselves as a way of responding to the bewildering variety of experience that the world is and to make sense of what would otherwise be chaos. The meanings so created are then transformed into the particular world of the community concerned and are seen as the norm, as central to its sense of self and its aspiration to live on, engaging in cultural reproduction. The myths and symbols on which communities rely also act as a boundary towards the external world and control the boundary traffic—certain ideas are screened in, while others are screened out. These processes are not necessarily conscious; nor are they manipulative, but constitute the normal means of community maintenance.

Cultural Reproduction

The continuity of communities, their reproduction, the capacity of their members to recognise one another and to establish boundaries towards nonmembers all depend in part on the web of symbolic meanings that are generated and used to sustain solidarity. Furthermore, once a community is established at the symbolic level, it will necessarily sacralise the bases of its founding assumptions, meaning that they will be placed in the realm of doxa, where the 'normal and natural' is encoded and where implicit meanings reside; this means that for the members of that community, the assumptions so encoded will be beyond ordinary scrutiny. Nonmembers of the community can quite often see these assumptions—certainly, the symbolic and ritual forms that they take will be quite visible—but they will not identify with them. Thus at the most everyday level, people will identify themselves with their flag, but for others, the particular colours of someone else's flag will generate no resonance.

Globalisation

In the last 10-15 years, however, a new phenomenon has appeared with far-reaching consequences for identity formation. This is globalisation. Globalisation should be seen as a series of overlapping and interconnected processes, not just economic and fiscal, but also informational, technological and a whole range of other activities. There is a causal nexus operating here, so that globalisation in one area can reinforce it in another. The crucial result of globalisation is that established tradition is rapidly fragmented, the denseness of meanings is diluted and coherence feels threatened. Communities feel that they have lost control over their destinies. The loss is too rapid to be easily replaced—something that could be done in the past—and the outcome is a bewilderment, a fear, a sense that both individual and collective security, faith in the future, transparency and predictability are being destroyed.

Consequently, we feel that we can no longer devise viable life strategies, that our cultural meanings are differently interpreted by different members of the community, so that solidarity is waning. We find it difficult to respond to these challenges, we do not necessarily even have the language for doing so, and the most that we can do is to retreat into the thickets of our cultural norms, underpinned by a stronger insistence on our symbols and myths. The problem is that much as we would like to do this, the sheltered quality of our cultural norms is in danger, there is or there seems to be no safe area because of the impact of globalisation. Our endeavours to recreate tradition, through the packaging of history and memory in theme parks, for example, do not work too well when our self-awareness is constantly reinforced by the flood of information about ourselves. This is the phenomenon known as reflexivity and reflexivity does not make for an easy world.

In Europe, we tend to see globalisation as having its roots in the United States. When we resent its effects on us, it is the intrusion of US values that we dislike and above all, we dislike it that what we regard as US norms are presented to us as universal norms, whereas we know that they are not so. How do we know? Because we have our culture, our distinctive cultural norms, that are not respected by what we perceive as those of the United States. We do not seem to have consented to them, there has been no negotiation, they just arrive and we take them or else. In this sense, globalisation directly erodes our sense of moral worth and produces defensive reactions—identities are changing and our control of that change seems weak.

Conclusion

Broadly, there are both positive and negative trends in inter-ethnic relations in Europe and it is far too easy to concentrate on the pathology, as many do, and to ignore the success stories. The war in Kosovo in 1999 and the ensuing ethnicisation of the territory were, indeed, a major catastrophe, but success stories are generally less conspicuous and much less sensational. The central proposition is that there are indeed successful ways of managing inter-ethnic conflict, but these demand long, slow and often tedious negotiations that are much less visible—the extremely lengthy negotiations that resulted in the relatively relaxed state of affairs in the South Tyrol is a case in point.

Second, although the process of European integration via the European Union is likewise slow, cumbersome and bureaucratic, it has resulted in the rise of a European identity that for certain purposes transcends the nation, the state and ethnicity. European integration is a very long-term project and its outcome remains unclear. But what is indubitable is that for the generations born after the 1960s, it has become the norm and they accept that their European identities bring them closer to one another than before.

Third, the rise of the discourse of human rights has a direct bearing on the fate of minorities—they are very much included in human rights normativity as a matter of principle. The radical nature of this turn is frequently underestimated. Before 1989, the treatment of ethnic minorities was overwhelmingly seen as an issue for the sovereign state. As argued, this is no longer the case and the process is far from over. Both politically and legally, minorities have acquired a protection that is denser and more effective than at any time in the past.

Fourth, the adoption of democracy throughout Europe, even where its functioning is imperfect, establishes far greater space for innovation than before. New forms of knowledge and power can create institutions for minorities—give them voice—at both the local and the state-wide levels that can in itself be helpful. Besides, democracy helps to ensure that neither the majority nor the minority defines itself as homogeneous and the consequent heterogeneity creates spaces where inter-ethnic cooperation can take root. The emphasis here is on 'can'; there is no automatic guarantee of success, but the potential is significantly greater than before 1989.

Further reading

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