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# ***“We All are Minorities – a Plea for Pluralism”***

***Challenges and Chances of Religious, Ethnic-Cultural,  
and Political Diversification in Contemporary Societies  
(from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives)  
Focus on Middle East***

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**EAF** Europäisches Abrahamisches Forum  
European Abrahamic Forum  
Evropski abrahamski forum

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**RHSC** Regional Human  
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#### CONCLUSION

However idealistic, even naïve, this stance might seem, it is worth consideration. It may be understood as an incentive or an invitation towards deeper reflection on certain specific problems of the modern world, which have been caused by the great variety of human cultures and religions. It is indisputable that, in many cases, both in domestic and international politics, the traditional recipes are not working. Sometimes it is necessary to take a radically different perspective. The view proposed above is only an outline. It calls for more sophisticated analyses, both on the theoretical, as well as on the practical level. As regards the former, we need to reconsider the entire Western social concept in the light of philosophical theories such as, for example, that of epistemological pluralism. With reference to the latter, thorough analyses would be needed of the mutual influence of radically different civilizations, and of the possibility of the introduction of “foreign” elements into existing cultural patterns. It would at least be worth a try.

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#### ORIGIO OR RATIO?

#### THE ETHNICIZATION OF POLITICS AND THE BANKRUPTCY OF HUMANISM

*A man like you does not stay  
where the accident of birth has thrown him; or if he stays,  
he stays out of insight, reasons, choice of the better.  
(Sultan Salahaddin to Nathan<sup>1</sup>)*

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the German writer Gotthold Ephraim Lessing pledged to consider birth as an accident, to qualify one’s birth and to put it into perspective. It didn’t matter where the accident of birth had thrown people. According to him everybody could change because of his or her own will and rationality. What mattered was tolerance as a common ground of humanity.

Everybody was free to go and leave – away from the place where birth had thrown him to towards a different destination. Maybe he or she may come back one day, but then because of insight, not because of any “natural law”. Maybe he or she will never return to the starting point but decide to take another place, just because of insight and will of one’s own.

This starting point serves as a contrast in the discussion about ethnicity and nationalism, because today not many people can opt out of their roles, can

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<sup>1</sup> GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING: *Nathan der Weise*, Stuttgart 1987 (orig.1779).

qualify their birth, and put their origin into perspective. They are pinned down to a place, a group and thus to a certain social and political role.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, many people had hopes of a new world of global citizenship, and of widening horizons. But contrary of many expectations, so-called ethnic conflicts flamed up in Europe and destroyed hopes of a more peaceful future based on universal values and ideas, as some scholars had pointed out at that time. The principle of origin had again become more and more important – and it gained *political* relevance. The principle of origin has turned into a political resource.

It was a matter of life or death, if one was born a Muslim, an Orthodox or a Catholic in Bosnia in the 1990s, if someone was a Hutu or Tutsi in Rwanda. The same had already happened during the separation of colonial India in the 1940s where neighbours were suddenly divided into who was a Hindu and who was a Muslim. All this came back to the political scene with a big bang in the 1990s - 200 years after Nathan the Sage thought it to be evident that birth and origin were a coincidence of life.

The “accident of birth” has become a political instrument whose subject and object is the individual. People are separated into groups *apriori* and irreversibly without taking into account what they really think – independently of their external features like skin, language or customs.

#### FUZZY TERMS

Origin – a supposed common origin – is the main ingredient of ethnicity. It forms the key of its concept, although historians, political scientists, anthropologists and ethnologists have not found a consensus in defining this term. And probably they never will.<sup>2</sup> Without going too much into details here, it is important to note that in this sense, “nation” is the politicized form of “ethnicity”. The gist of nation, as it is mostly used today, has something to do with this “ethnic” origin. In the literature we cannot find a universal definition of nation either. But somehow it is a group of people who share some political ambition for a common cause – in clear demarcation to self-defined “others” – in form of a zero sum game in the fight about resources such as territory, power or people. It is a fight for exclusive political goals.

As several authors have pointed out, nations consist to a great deal of emotions. This means we are dealing with a *feeling* of common descent. Not more but not less! This is enough to make ethnicity politically relevant. When a politicization of ethnic groups takes place, an ethnicization of politics can follow

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<sup>2</sup> More details on the discussion on ethnicity can be found in: CARSTEN WIELAND: *Nationalstaat wider Willen: Die Politisierung von Ethnien und die Ethnisierung der Politik – Bosnien, Indien, Pakistan*, Frankfurt / New York 2000 (Engl.: *Nation-state by Accident: The Politicization of Ethnic Groups and the Ethnicization of Politics, Bosnia, India, Pakistan*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishing House, 2006; Arab.: *الدولة القومية: تفسيرا. تنبؤات و أتنه السياسة, البوسنة, الهند, باكستان*, Damascus: Mada Publishing House, 2007).

swiftly and determine the paradigm in which domestic politics and even foreign policies are being shaped.

Nobody asks those people who live together in a society what values they share, what legal principles they accept, as the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) defined his term of nation. In his idea, individuals associate themselves in a state by free will with a self-determined constitution and government.<sup>3</sup> This played a role in the French Revolution. Therefore, the French definition of nation is based on the *citoyen*. A nation is formed in a state with existing borders because of the enlightened consciousness of people with common convictions. It is a community of choice and not of ascription. It is an ideal type in the Weberian sense, of course, but it helps us to define the fundamental values behind a political construction.

When people speak of “nation” today, they mostly do not have the French model in mind. They think of a term of nation that is based on presumed descent, emotions and sometimes even the idea of a “blood community”. This idea is called the organic or German term of nation. So today, when the word nation is used, it is almost always used in the German, the organic sense, the ethno-nation with apriori assumptions. The other person is defined by origin, not by his rationality (*origio* instead of *ratio*). It doesn't matter what people think, what political, social, economic and ethical interests they have. What matters is where they come from. Nathan the Sage seems forgotten.

Reframing it in the terms of German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936) this means that ethno-nationalists want to transform a *society* into a *community*. A purely “ideal, mechanical” link of otherwise separated people is substituted by the bond of “real and organic life”, an apriorical “unity of will”. Tönnies describes the contrast between society and community as follows: “Society is the public, is the world. In the community of his own one is bound right from birth, with all weal and woe. One goes into society like into alien lands.” And in the society no activities take place, “which can be traced from a unity that exists *a priori* and necessarily”.<sup>4</sup>

There is, of course, a problem of tension between multiplicity and unity in every state, and there are different forms to manage it. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (\*1929), for example, doesn't conjure any primordial factors in order to define loyalty to the state. In his view, loyalty to the modern

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<sup>3</sup> „Die erstlich nach Prinzipien der Freiheit der Glieder einer Gesellschaft (als Menschen), zweitens nach Grundsätzen der *Abhängigkeit* aller von einer einzigen gemeinsamen Gesetzgebung (als Untertanen) und drittens nach dem Gesetz der *Gleichheit* derselben (als *Staatsbürger*) gestiftete Verfassung – die einzige, welche aus der Idee des ursprünglichen Vertrags hervorgeht, auf der alle rechtliche Gesetzgebung eines Volkes gegründet sein muss – ist die *republikanische*.“ (IMMANUEL KANT: *Zum ewigen Frieden* (1795), Stuttgart 1984, pp. 10-11 (original italics)).

<sup>4</sup> FERDINAND TÖNNIES: *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Darmstadt, 1972 (acc. to edn. 1935) [1887] (*Community and Association*, London, 1955), pp. 3, 40 [1887] (orig. italics; own translation).

nation state comes and should come from the performance of a state. He links confession for a nation to the efficiency of the welfare state. This is the substitute for the emotional and ideological glue from the times of nationalism, as he terms it. Civil rights must pay off: "My suspicion is that a liberal political culture can hold together multi-cultural societies only if democratic citizenship pays in terms not only of liberal and political rights, but of social and cultural rights as well."<sup>5</sup> This means pointedly: If the nation can no longer "buy" the citizens, they turn their back on it.

#### A CIRCULAR DYNAMIC

By contrast, the ethno-national concept is problematic in yet another aspect. When nations enter into this circular paradigm, the focus is on group rights, not on universal human rights anymore. The constitutions of the Balkan states mention principle nations and other groups, e.g. Macedonia is composed of Macedonians, but also Albanians, Bulgarians, etc. If a civil democratic state mentions equal rights to all its citizens, it evades the problem of having to mention every single group up to the tiniest minority - if the intention is to mention all of them at all and to respect all of them. If Israel intends to define itself as a "Jewish state", it will enter into the same vicious circle of ideological classification and discrimination. There is a controversial debate among sociologists in Israel itself that dates back for many years as to whether Israel is a civil-democratic or an ethno-national state.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this paradigm has reached the political stage at the highest level and will continue to cause polarized debates and ideological discrimination if minority rights are not strengthened and respected at the same time.

Ethno-nationalists presuppose that an ethnic community must have common political interests as well. This is an automatic assumption. Everything is clear from the beginning. No political decision-finding process is necessary. This is why, in this paradigm, it makes sense to live in a state of one's own and to form exclusive political institutions.

Nationalisms (including the Arab and the Jewish versions) have both a content and a function. The *function* of Arab nationalism consisted of liberalization – anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, and to some extent, political reforms. The *content* was and is clearly ethno-national. Arab nationalism, defined by the Arab language, is not a civic democratic nationalism of the French kind. However, the advantage of Arab nationalism is that it can integrate different religions, because language is the main contrasting feature and not religion. The first Arab nationalists in the modern sense were Christians of Lebanon, who received the ideas from Europe. Arab nationalism has the disadvantage though that it excludes other groups defined by language like Kurds and others. A po-

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<sup>5</sup> JÜRGEN HABERMAS: *The European Nation-state: Its Achievements and Its Limits. On the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship*, in: GOPAL BALAKRISHNAN (ed.): *Mapping the Nation*, London / New York 1996, p. 290.

<sup>6</sup> URI RAM: *The Changing Agenda of Israeli Sociology*, New York 1995.

litical solution has to be found to come to grips with this innate problem of an ethno-nationalism such as Arabism and to avoid confrontations.

The question is what has remained of the function, of the reform part of Arab nationalism and its movements. Or is it only the content, the “Arab” that has remained? Other cases of Risorgimento, of emancipating reform nationalism have also turned into a reactionary nationalism that is contracting itself and confronting others. If Arab nationalism today is seen as “Arab” only, then one has to ask what is behind it, what is still the function, what is left? The lack of social, political and economic reforms is a big problem in the region, the focus on primordial issues like religion and tradition as the solution for today’s complex problems.

If in Bosnia, India/Pakistan, Lebanon or Iraq: Religion has mostly been the key element of contrast against others, the key element to form an a priori group of – presumed - common interest up to the political level. But as history shows, religion alone has never been enough to mobilize people, and to mobilize them against each other. Neither have other ethnic features been strong enough to serve as a political mobilizer, such as language, customs, etc.

What was needed to achieve a political mobilization around these elements were other factors that sharpened the contrast between religious groups. Very often religion is the centre around which further elements of contrast are being constructed. Let’s call it the “ethnecentre” as the political epicentre of concussions.

In the following, I will present some of these contrast boosting factors in the contexts of the politicization of ethnic groups and the ethnicization of politics in India/Pakistan in the 1940s and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s. It shows how ethnicity as a factor that is interpreted and influenced by other factors (dependent variable) turns into a factor that determines political outcomes by its own (independent variable).

#### CONTRAST BOOSTERS

##### *1. History*

History and historiography are shaped by ethno-nationalists as a proof of a “common descent” and origin. The further one’s own history reaches into the past, the best it serves to justify their present political purposes. History also serves to forge an emotional community. Therefore, a highly selective historiography is needed. Selective history becomes the “national history” in the end.

In Bosnia, for example, the so-called Bogomil myth existed and was refreshed each time when the ethno-national debate turned violent. It is no coincidence that the Bogomil myth experienced a boost whenever the *Zeitgeist* suggested upgrading Bosnian Muslims (Bosnjaks) as an ethno-nation – against the ethno-national competition which viewed ‘the Muslims’ as Serbs, Croats, or Turks. This is especially true during the Austro-Hungarian period of Bosnia-Herzegovina (from 1900 onwards) and later in Tito’s Yugoslavia (from the 1960s onwards).

In a nutshell, the myth holds that the whole of the Bosnian noble class (adherents to the Bogomil Church) converted to Islam all at once as a group after

the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia in 1463 and Herzegovina in 1482. Since the majority of the Bosnian population consisted of Bogomils as well, they were also converted *en masse*. So the idea behind is that Bosnian Muslims (Bosnjaks) are not Muslims only, but an ethnic group by their own, which includes many other features as well such as costumes, a common culture, class consciousness, and a common history. Historians have proved that this is a myth indeed, because conversions took place gradually and one by one, mostly because people were looking for more social and political opportunities which the Ottoman Empire granted to Muslims. There were no compulsory conversions either.<sup>7</sup>

In India, the Arian myth served a similar purpose. Some Hindu nationalists like to refer to a phenomenon around 1500 B.C.: An Indo-Germanic tribe named "Aryan" allegedly immigrated from central Asia to northern India (and another part to Europe). It defeated the high civilization of the Indus valley and formed the ruling class in the northern part of the sub-continent. Historic myths are supposed to endow a religious group with "ethnic" characteristics – in this case even racial-biological ones. Their argument was: The true Hindus are the Aryans, the highest "race" of India which had laid the foundations of Hindu religion and culture. The fairer-skinned, upper-caste Hindus are their direct descendants. This turns all others into strangers, especially the later "immigrants" like Muslims and Christians.<sup>8</sup> Thus Hindus are supposed to be more than a religious group, but an ethnic group or even a "nation" as also ethno-nationalist Muslims saw themselves as in Mohammed Ali Jinnah's Two Nation Theory. The British as the colonial power in the end agreed to this Two Nation Theory and followed the logic that "the Muslims" in India needed a state of its own.

## 2. Territory

The notion of territory is linked to a special (ethnic) group. Notorious is the construction of the idea of a "Holy Land" for one ethnic group in order to strengthen its identity in place. The battle of Kosovo 1389 was pushed to be a "battle of destiny" for the Serb nation (used frequently by Slobodan Milosevic 1989 and in the subsequent years), although Kosovo today is not even part of Serbia anymore. "Mother India" was symbolized by the milk of cow for Hin-

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<sup>7</sup> More details about the Bogomil discussion: NOEL MALCOLM: *Bosnia: A Short History*, London <sup>2</sup>1996; SRECKO M. DZAJA: *Die "Bosnische Kirche" und das Islamisierungsproblem Bosniens und der Herzegovina in den Forschungen nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Munich 1978 and SRECKO M. DZAJA: *Konfessionalität und Nationalität Bosniens und der Herzegovina: Voremanzipatorische Phase 1463-1804*, Munich 1984.

<sup>8</sup> This argument has been particularly clearly disclosed and refuted by: ROMILA THAPAR: *The Theory of Aryan Race and India: History and Politics*, in: *Social Scientist* 24 (1996), pp. 1-3, and: *Interpreting Early India*, Oxford / New York / Delhi 1992, and ROMILA THAPAR: *The Past and Prejudice*, New Delhi, 1975; SATISH CHANDRA: *Historiography, Religion and the State in Medieval India*, New Delhi, 1996; CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT: *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925-1990: Strategies of Identity-Building, Implantation and Mobilization*, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 26ff.



dus, whereas Muslims, it was said, belonged to the Arabic Peninsula. All of a sudden, a notion of territory was ascribed to each group.

### 3. Language

The ethno-national logic goes as follows: The one, who *is* different and consequently *thinks* differently, must have a different language, too. If there is no language available, it has to be constructed. Language is a factor of solidarity.

In each case in Bosnia and in India/Pakistan the different “ethnic groups” were not constructed on grammatically different languages (*Abstandssprachen*). But each group was constructed upon the same linguistic raw material from which different languages (*Ausbausprachen*) were engineered by political motivation. In the Balkan case, the linguistic basis was Serbo-Croatian as the language of the South Slavs from which Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian was carved. In the Indian case it was Hindustani from which the languages Urdu (= Muslim = Pakistan) and Hindi (= Hindi = India) were developed in the ethno-national point of view. Persian words were adopted to make Urdu more “Muslim”, and Turkish words have entered the Bosnian language in order to strengthen the semantic differences between the ethno-nations.

But still today, in Pakistan youngsters watch Bollywood movies from India without subtitles, because it is simply the same language, just with a different script. Only a tiny fraction of Pakistanis spoke Urdu when it became the official language after Pakistan’s independence. The majority language was Bengali in East Pakistan, and it was, among other things, a fight of equal opportunities in the Urdu speaking government service of Pakistan that escalated into the separation of East Pakistan and West Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh as a new state in 1971. So when Pakistan (West- and East Pakistan) once existed, the “ethniculture” suddenly turned from religion to language. Punjabi and many other regional languages have remained influential idioms in Pakistan thereafter, the same as in India.

On the Balkans, the inconsequentialities have remained equally obvious. US Special Envoy to the Balkans in the 1990s, Richard Holbrooke, recalls a scene during the Dayton peace negotiations in 1995: There were six language channels for translation: English, French, Russian, Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian. In the latter three channels the voice of the same translator could be heard!<sup>9</sup>

### 4. Customs

Customs are never as rigid as ethno-nationalists would like to have it; they cross-cut with different beliefs, social layers, etc.

In India, for example, some Muslims, i.e. converted Hindus, still do not eat beef (apart from refraining from pork), pray at certain temples at important occasions or consult a sadhu who reads the stars before marriage. Also in Bos-

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<sup>9</sup> RICHARD HOLBROOKE: *Meine Mission: Vom Krieg zum Frieden in Bosnien*, Munich / Zürich 1998 (orig.: *To End A War*, New York 1998), p. 359.

nia there existed and still exists a great tolerance of different customs or members from one religious group visit the celebrations of others.

Customs gained political relevance in an ethno-national context only. It was important that customs became a visible sign of group cohesion and demarcation against the other so-called ethnic group. Particularly problematic are conversions when religion is the “ethnically-centred” of conflict. Conversions are a problem for ethno-nationalists (as they are for religious fundamentalists) because these acts have political implications. Belief is no personal matter anymore but a political asset. Conversions reduce the number of personal resources that define the ethno-nation. Nobody is supposed to opt out from this constituency.

In an ethno-national context, customs become more radical, are purified and (over)loaded with relevance ex-post.

#### *5. Violence*

At the final stage of the process in which “ethnicity” becomes more relevant to the political process, violence may enter as a reinforcer of separation and often irreconcilable contrast. Minor arguments or debates that would have caused a shrugging of shoulders in earlier contexts grow into symbolic proportions. The inevitable objective ascription of people can mean life or death for anybody. Techniques of provocations resemble each other very much in Bosnia and colonial India. Neighbours become enemies, marriages separate, etc. Violence erupts in cases of real or alleged conversions, because the other side suspects a missionary movement behind every action and tries to defend its social and political turf.

Women suffer in particular, because they are the reproducers of the political good of the „right human being” as a political resource. Thus rape can turn into a strategic component of warfare like in India at the time of separation and in Bosnia in the 1990s. Rapes by the political ethno-national opponent prevent a “right birth” and deeply humiliate women as much as their husbands, brothers and children.

Violence or communal riots as they are called in India have convinced more and more people that different “ethnic groups” cannot live together and should have own borders that separate and protect them from each other.

#### DISTORTED POLITICAL OUTCOMES

These examples have shown that several factors are at play strengthening the notion of “ethnic groups” in increasingly hostile political environments. Ethnicity is a situative concept that can be constructed accordingly and change its shape from region to region, depending how the contrast boosters are used to strengthen the “ethnically-centred”. Of course, primordial material that already exists somewhere and in some diffuse form is tapped in order to transform it into instruments of separation and mobilization. This is why the concept of “ethnicity” consists of a primordial basis and a great deal of situative engineering.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The discussion between primordialists and situativists – and a suggestion of compromise – can be followed in: Wieland (see fn. 2).

In the case of Bosnia and Pakistan there was no Muslim mass movement for a nation-state as it can be found in various other countries as it is laid down in the modernization theory of nationalisms, where nationalism grows in different stages until it reaches a mass dimension. It starts out with an intellectual group and gradually widens its constituency through publications etc. until it turns into a mass movement. In these cases, however, this did not take place in such a scheme. In colonial India, people were mobilized along ethno-national lines in the “last minute”, in the last few years before India’s independence and breakup with support of the British in 1947. In the Bosnian context, there remained no alternative in a crumbling Yugoslavia. Slovenia and Croatia declared themselves independent with the help of the European Community, and Serbia tried to dominate the rest. Everything fell apart around the Bosnian Muslims (Bosnjaks). But still they were the group who felt most “Yugoslavian” of all other sub-nations according to opinion polls under Tito. Many Bosnjaks defended the multi-culturalism of Sarajevo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and were far from forming a mass movement in favour of a Muslim homeland on the Balkans. The Bosnjaks were the least nationally conscious ones and the least politically active ones. What took place was a reactive – or a “negative” - nation and state building.

The paradigm of “ethnicity” has a very strong circular dynamic. Once actors like the European Community in Bosnia or the colonial British in India accepted the notion of an “ethnic conflict”, they were looking for solutions within the “ethnic” paradigm. A zero sum game of exclusive bargaining started. You give something to one group, and the other one starts complaining. At the same time, political resources are being taken away from those few left who are trying to run a supra-ethnic platform with political contents such as the economy, social issues, etc. Who would vote for a supra- or trans-ethnic politician if everybody has to define himself as a member of an “ethnic group”? For example in Yugoslavia: Those who wanted to start a political career and enter the Communist Party could not become a member of a Yugoslav communist party. Already under President Josip Bros Tito people could enter the Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian, etc. communist party only. Everybody had to define himself as part of an “ethnic group” first in order to become a communist politician.

With ethno-national parties, no sophisticated political discourse is necessary because everything is clear by definition. The contrast to the (ethno-)political foe seems obvious. No opinion-building process is necessary. The party programs of ethno-national parties in Bosnia, for example, used to be thinner than those of social democrats or communists. Ethno-national parties had no elaborated vision of society, economy, and domestic politics. But because of their intrinsic nature, they can fill a political vacuum much more quickly when institutions collapse.

At the high end of “ethnic” outcomes in politics are physical separations such as tunnels, bridges or bypass roads like in Israel. But also in Bosnia the confederation model (Owen/Stoltenberg Plan) triggered the haggle over territorial percentages up to behind the decimal point. During the Dayton negotiations the strongest outbursts of rage arose while debating on maps. The chief negotiators arbitra-

rily drew the internal boundaries of Bosnia-Herzegovina on big drawing boards and with the joystick in computer cartographies.<sup>11</sup> The details of the plans seem to be absurd, too. The Owen/Stoltenberg Plan intended to build a three-storey highway flyover over the so-called Serb corridor near the north Bosnian city of Brčko. On the first level Serbs were supposed to drive, on the second Muslims and on the third Croats. And a five kilometer long bridge was to span “foreign” territory so that “the Muslims” could have access to the sea.<sup>12</sup>

#### MISTAKES REPEATED IN IRAQ

A very recent example where the ethnic paradigm strongly ruled is the post-war situation in Iraq. What has happened in Iraq since 2003 is the ethnicization of politics, a very familiar phenomenon that reminds us of the darkest chapters of ethno-national politics and flawed “conflict solution” in Bosnia, Lebanon, and in colonial times with the partition of India and Pakistan (which left behind a still simmering ethno-national or “communal” conflict in Kashmir). These were and are all solutions within the “paradigm of ethnicity”. Some critics even hold that “Lebanonization” will become the feature of pluralism in the Middle East if the U.S. administration continues to pursue the same policy of playing out religious and ethnic groups against each other like it has been the case in Iraq even long before the war.<sup>13</sup>

The US administration went into Iraq with the notion that they were confronting three groups: Shiites, Sunni, and Kurds. After the war, the attempt to reconstruct Iraqi political institutions was short-sighted and stayed within the same paradigm without any profound socio-political reflection. The Iraqi Governing Council was composed, of all possibilities, according to an ethnic and religious ratio. At least, this category played the dominant role for the Council’s composition. The alternative would have been a clear emphasis, in politics and the media, on ideologies and social forces like trade unions, women, peasants, communists, liberals, conservatives, and maybe amended by regional representatives.

Because of his narrow domestic and business background, then US administrator Paul Bremer objected to the appointment of communists in the Iraqi parliament, although they were the only trans-ethnic alternative at that time. The UN representative in Iraq, Viera de Mello (who later died in a terrorist attack in Baghdad) had a hard time to convince him otherwise.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, the “ethnic” paradigm predominated clearly. Although, for example, one of the 25 members of the Governing Council was the secretary of the Iraqi Communist Party (Hamid Majeed Mousa) and another one was from the Iraqi Women’s Organization (Songhul Chapouk), they were listed and

<sup>11</sup> HOLBROOKE: op. cit. (fn. 9), pp. 392ff.

<sup>12</sup> SEIFUN TOKIC: „Ethnische Ideologie und Eroberungskrieg: Zur Kritik der Aufteilung Bosnien-Herzegowinas“, in: NENAD STEFANOV & MICHAEL WERZ (ed.): *Bosnien und Europa: Die Ethnisierung der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt/M. 1994, p. 180.

<sup>13</sup> Salama, in: *Al-Abram Weekly* 2/3-9/05

<sup>14</sup> GEORGE PACKER: *Assassin’s Gate: America in Iraq*, New York 2005.

counted as a Shiites, respectively as a Turcoman, first and foremost.<sup>15</sup> This misconception has helped to reinforce primordial and parochial alignments that found their latest expression in the first elections in January 2005. The composition of the interim cabinet that was created in September 2003 followed the same rationale: Among the ministers were 14 Shiites, 5 Sunni, 5 Kurds, one Assyrian. Among the Shiites and Sunni there was one Turcoman each.

This context provides the ground for the typical problem that one primordial group feels neglected vis-à-vis the other(s). There is no way out within this paradigm. Political claims are and can be articulated only through ethno-national representatives. There is no room for trans- or supra-“ethnic” political forces.

After a war like in Iraq, after a complete regime collapse, with following occupation, quasi colonization, and a comprehensive international mandate for political and economic reconstruction (through the controversial UN Resolutions 1483 in May, and 1511 in October 2003) there was enough of a political vacuum to set the points into a new direction. It could have been a step into the direction of a democratic state with the development of a civil society that has suffered so much under Saddam Hussein.

Of course, religious and other primordial elements would have pushed into politics, especially after decades of unjust distribution of resources and political power. But when, if not after such a moment of destruction and new beginning is there a chance to at least try to escape the “paradigm of ethnicity”? This opportunity was definitely missed and primordialism became a self-fulfilling prophecy with the policy makers.

#### A BREAK OF PARADIGM IN TURKEY?

Recent developments in Turkey suggest the first possibility of a counter development to the primordial view of nationalism. The process has just started and is still far from being accomplished. Nevertheless, the changes that have taken place in Turkey since 2002 under the ruling Justice and Developing Party (AKP) are breaking paradigms. The pillar of modern Turkish identity and state ideology has been secular, etatist and populist Kemalism whose ingredients include a very consequent form of ethnic nationalism. This was in line with the paradigm in which most other European nations developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and this helped to bridge the transition from the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman Empire to a “modern nation-state” after World War I.

This definition of Turkishness has thrown the nation into decade long conflicts with its religious and ethnic minorities and neighbours, above all with

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<sup>15</sup> The Governing Council, as chosen by the US administration in Iraq in July 2003, was made up of 25 people: Thirteen members were Shi'a, five Kurdish (most of the Kurds are Sunni), five Sunni Arabs, one Christian and one Turcoman. The United Nations Security Council in its Resolution 1500 in August 2003 described the Governing Council as “broadly representative” and praised its formation as “an important step towards the formation by the people of Iraq of an internationally recognized, representative government [...]”

Armenians and Kurds. Now after Turkey has reached an increased level of political and economic stability, a change of paradigm with regard to its definition of nationalism is gradually underway. In fall 2005, for the first time in the nation's history, Recep Tayyip Erdogan conceded that there was a Kurdish problem and that the state has made mistakes. He offered a solution by redefining Turkish nationalism. The moderate Islamist Prime Minister spoke of a Turkish "supra-identity" of all citizens below which there can be "sub-identities" of ethnic definition, like Kurds, Armenians etc. without turning them into minorities.<sup>16</sup> A new "civil" constitution is envisaged to mention "Turkish citizens" instead of "ethnic Turks". Using the Kurdish language in state broadcasting and education is no taboo any longer. This paid off politically as well, since in the 2007 elections the AKP gained more votes from Kurds than the ethnic Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP). However, in the local elections in March 2009 the Kurds voted more ethnically aligned again.

With what he calls the "democratic opening" Erdogan hopes to solve the domestic Kurdish conflict and, at the same time, to improve relations with historically uncomfortable neighbours like Armenia with whom Turkey in September 2009 announced to establish diplomatic relations.

In other words, Turkey is in a process of changing its ideology of nationalism from the German to the French model – if the process moves on without disturbances, ethno-national backlashes from ethnic Turks and opposition parties or an ethno-national cum political revival of Kurdish nationalists. The AKP government is trying to use soft power to solve a problem of highly military significance. Even Turkey's top military commander, General Ilker Basbug, has argued along Erdogan's line: "Turkishness is a generic identity (supra-identity) referring to the all equal citizens of Turkey, regardless of their ethnic background."<sup>17</sup>

A foreign policy of "zero problems" with its neighbours, Neo-Ottomanism and Islam as a new driving force of social and political identity are the ingredients of today's Turkey. Since Islam as a factor of national identity is gaining legitimacy in competition with the Kemalist ideology, ethnicity as a demarcating factor is losing ground. Some scholars already speak of a process of "de-ethnicization of national identity" in Turkey.<sup>18</sup>

Islam in its theology is a supra-ethnic religion. However, using Islam as a factor of common identity shifts the demarcation line away from ethnic minorities towards people of different faith. Indeed, the relationship between the

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<sup>16</sup> HEINZ KRAMER: Türkische Turbulenzen: Der andauernde Kulturkampf um die richtige Republik, SWP-Studie 2009/S 11, März 2009, p. 25 = available at: [http://www.swp-berlin.org/common/get\\_document.php?asset\\_id=5856](http://www.swp-berlin.org/common/get_document.php?asset_id=5856).

<sup>17</sup> AYHAN SIMSEK: "Election result complicates Kurdish reform", in: *Southeast European Times*, April 20, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> WILLIAM HALE, Emeritus Professor in the department of Politics and International Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, at the international conference "Turkey and the Middle East" in the Danish Institute in Damascus, November 10, 2009.

Turkish state and its Jewish and Christian minorities remains tense. It is an open question if the de-ethnicization of Turkish identity will turn into a model of French-style citizenship or if the religious factor will take over as the next dominant primordial ingredient of nation-building. It remains also to be seen if this de-ethnicization of Turkish national ideology will affect the Arab neighbours as well, especially Syria with its oppressive Kurdish policy.

#### A PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTION

The Turkish case is an interesting exception where ethnicity is seen as part of the problem. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, ethnicity has prevailed as an important paradigm in international politics. Even though the attacks of September 11, 2001 might suggest that the attention was diverted from ethnic conflicts to issues such as Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, there was no real shift of paradigms. The fundamental common denominator of both ethno-nationalism and religious fundamentalism is the focus on primordial features, on descent, not on rational, flexible or even multiple identities. People are condemned to allegedly unchangeable ethnic or religious ascriptions.

In philosophical terms this expresses the bankruptcy of humanism. Not only is the unimpeachable moral value of human beings increasingly ignored in the conflicts and conceptions that have dominated since 1989 through asymmetric conflicts that tend to ignore international conventions of warfare and human rights. People's moral equality regardless of religious conviction or descent as well as the freedom of individual choice have equally been ignored. People are not judged according to what they think but on what they "are" by birth.

The hopes in the first months and years after the fall of the Berlin Wall have not been fulfilled. For a moment many people hoped to see a world that would transcend national borders and be based on an enlightened world citizenship that could tackle global problems. When the wall came down in Berlin in 1989, two new potential paradigms opened up: One was the *paradigm of humanism* (e.g. Czempiel hints at that possibility<sup>19</sup>) and the other one the *paradigm of primordialism*.

This is a philosophical problem, too. Ideals and achievements of enlightenment are in ruins, such as that individuals are a) equal no matter what convictions they follow, and b) have their right and properties to determine their own position in the ethic, social, and political framework - and the right to opt out without being targeted.

Nathan the Sage was far ahead in his time when he said to the guardian of the temple:

*Ab! If only I had found one person more in you  
for whom it was sufficient to be a human being!*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> ERNST-OTTO CZEMPIEL: *Weltpolitik im Umbruch*, München 2002.

<sup>20</sup> LESSING (1987), p. 69. [1779] (see fn. 1).