# The Bankruptcy of Humanism? Primordialism Dominates the Agenda of International Politics

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After September 11 many people spoke of a »new era,« a »watershed moment,« and even a new chapter of modern history. It seemed that the world had been at a loss for the previous ten years, and that the search for a new foreign policy paradigm had finally come to a close. Henceforth, »terrorism« has moved political discussions, strategies, and decision-making.

However, »terrorism« has become a catch-all term whose contours have been considerably distorted since September 11. In particular, the lines between resistance and terrorism have been blurred, which has had its strongest impact on power relations in the Middle East. On the other hand, the term »state terrorism« has regained momentum in an attempt to set comparable legal standards in relation to attacks on innocent civilians by either side (Shukri 1991 proposed this term in an early work). There is no space here to develop definitions of terrorism. It has always been a flexible concept, and neither scholars nor politicians have reached a consensus (Hoffman 2001). With regard to the political impact of this concept, Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah is certainly right when he says: »Defining terrorism is one of the most difficult problems in the world today.«

When people talk of »terrorism« post September 11, most have »international« and/or »Islamic fundamentalist« terrorism in mind. This helps us to roughly narrow down the phenomenon for the purposes of this discussion. The lack of consensus on the definition of terrorism, however, has not prevented use of the term. Few foreign policy speeches made these days do not mention terrorism. Numerous political decisions in both foreign and domestic politics, from immigration laws to wars, are justified in its name. Therefore, to speak of a terrorism paradigm in international politics after September 11 looks plausible at first glance, even if the definition is not clear. Dialectically speaking, frequent references to »terrorism« have made it a dominant concept, and have thus led to a range of political outcomes in real terms (from new domestic legislation

on security to the formation of new alliances and the waging of wars), which further consolidates its intellectual and practical prevalence. This is the very nature of a paradigm. This does not mean that there was no terrorism before September 11, but since then it has reached a new and higher level in everyday political rhetoric and international politics. However, despite these considerations I will argue that September 11 brought about no real change of paradigm.

## From Ethno-Nationalism to Islamic Fundamentalism

First of all, a change of paradigm implies that another paradigm preceded it. What was the concept that moved the world before the attacks against New York and Washington? Of course, there was a lot of disorientation after the end of the Cold War, and many options seemed to be open. Multilateralism, international liberalism, democratic peace, a new era of democracy, human rights, political freedom and participation are some of the ideas that emerged in a spirit of hope (Czempiel 2002: 66ff). In the end, however, the real driving force turned out to be the issues of »ethnicity« and »ethnic conflict.«

For the sake of the argument, therefore, if a »paradigm of terrorism« has been in place since September 11, we might say that the period between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the destruction of the World Trade Center came under the »paradigm of ethnicity.« Most international crises and debates revolved around this issue after the Cold War patterns of confrontation had vanished. Of course, like terrorism, there had been ethnonational conflicts before, especially in post-colonial Africa, India, and – in proxy wars – Asia and even Latin America. However, the frequency and dominance of the phenomenon on the political agenda now became striking, not to mention the volatility of the political world map, whose borders had been quite stable for decades.

»Ethnicity« and »terrorism« have in common the fact that they swiftly came into use – rightly or wrongly – to cover a multitude of events and contexts. Both generated a mass of new literature, which contained many new insights but lacked the definitions required to establish a consensus.

Similarly to »terrorism,« »ethnicity« is a concept that lives from its proclaimed idea. As Max Weber pointed out: »The belief in group affinity, regardless of whether it has any objective foundation, can have important consequences, especially for the formation of a political commu-

nity« (Weber 1921, English quote from Connor 1980: 202). Benedict Anderson's famous notion of »imagined communities« also underlines this point (Anderson 1991).

The paradigm of ethnicity or, more politically, ethno-nationalism, does not suggest, of course, that ethnic groups – still less all members of them – inevitably fight each other. What it primarily refers to is an ideal in the name of which conflicts have been fought by political elites dependent on collapsing ideologies, eroded state structures, and primordial sentiments (just as some recent wars have been fought in the name of terrorism but in fact based on multiple or altogether different objectives, for example, regime change). The fundamental idea behind ethno-nationalism is that people share common primordial features and so necessarily have common political interests as well, and thus, ideally, their own state. This is a fatal alliance of objective primordial ascription and objective political ascription. The coincidence of birth has become a political asset.

However, »ethnicity« could advance to the status of a dominant paradigm in international politics only because external actors took it up. The political options of conflict resolution were thus limited to ethno-national outcomes. Most external mediators rashly adopted the view that every ethno-nation should have its own state, ideally a nation-state. This manifested itself in the *ex post* legitimation of ethnic expulsions and separation, including the abstruse planning and construction of tunnels, bridges, and walls.[1] As a lesson from the poor handling of the Yugoslav case, the European Union tried a different approach in Kosovo where it helped the Albanians in their struggle for human rights but not to a state of their own. However, the ethno-national paradigm is still dominant and the outcome pending. Discussions about the final status of Kosovo have been continuously put off by frightened mediators.

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1. In Bosnia, the plan of the international mediators Lord Owen and Stoltenberg envisaged a three-storey highway bridge over the so-called Serbian corridor near the north Bosnian city of Brcko. Serbs were supposed to drive their cars on the first level, Bosnjaks on the second, and Croatians on the third. A five-kilometre-long bridge over »alien« territory was to grant Bosnjaks access to the sea. See Seifudin Tokic, »Ethnische Ideologie und Eroberungskrieg: Zur Kritik der Aufteilung Bosnien-Herzegowinas,« in Nenad Stefanov and Michael Werz (eds), *Bosnien und Europa: Die Ethnisierung der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt/M. 1994. As mind-boggling as this plan may be, it has been a reality for quite some time in Israel/Palestine with bypass roads, tunnels, and bridges for Jewish settlers cutting through Palestinian land, and through the new »security wall.«

The ethno-national paradigm, moreover. entails a focus on collective instead of individual rights, a tendency towards concepts of geographic distance, political autonomy, territorial separation, and normatively overloaded notions of sovereignty. The collapse of Yugoslavia is a prime example. The possible fixing of problems within an existing state structure in a civil-democratic paradigm became obsolete (Wieland 2000, 2005).

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In this sense, the end of the Cold War brought into being two contradictory outlooks. The first was linked to humanist, comprehensive ideas of self-determination, as well as ideals of democracy and freedom. The second was an even stronger a priori and objective classification of human beings into ethno-national camps. Without doubt, the latter has prevailed.

In this context one should note that the »French« notion of nation has been edged out by the »German« one. Whenever and wherever people speak about »nation« and »nationalism« today, they mostly have their »ethnic« connotations in mind. The talk is about national feeling, not about civil convictions and loyalties; the idea of a common descent in demarcation from others, not common political ideas and concepts; primordial features, not shared values and free will; the emphasis is on origo, not ratio. The enlightened ideas of Immanuel Kant and the French Revolution are passé. The Romantics Fichte and Herder are celebrating a comeback. This background in the history of ideas shaped political conflicts under the »paradigm of ethnicity.«

In this and many other regards nothing has changed since September 11. The claim that a change of paradigm has taken place seems exaggerated. For many who have written about globalization in recent years, »ethnicity« and the new scope of international terrorism – which entails the question of cultural parochialism like Islamic fundamentalism – are two sides of the same coin (Barber 1996; Friedman 2000).

Therefore, the real change of paradigm took place with the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 – 11/9, one might say – not with Bin

Laden's attacks on the USA in 2001 – 9/11. If the forces of ethno-nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism, and international terrorism have anything in common it is that they circumvent the classic level of conflicts and conflict resolution, namely the state or, more usually, the nation-state.

> Both ideologies – ethno-nationalism and religious fundamentalism – suffer from reductionism and absolutism: reductionism of political concepts and world views; absolutism in violence and »moral« legitimation.

There are many other common features. The ideological programs of both ethno-nationalism and religious fundamentalism are remarkably shallow. Answers seem to be easy, goals are clear. Good and bad, friend and enemy are quickly and clearly defined. The election programs of ethno-national parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, were always thinner than those of their smaller liberal or social democratic counterparts. As with religious fundamentalists, ethno-nationalists mostly avoid detailed and constructive elaborations of how society and state should look, or how social and economic progress can be achieved. If one takes the nation-state or the Islamic state away, nothing much is left.

The voices of those who predict a decline in Islamic fundamentalism in the wake of September 11 are getting louder for this very reason. One of them is the secular Syrian philosopher Sadiq Jalal Al-Azm who sees Islamic fundamentalists as past their peak since they lack a coherent political vision and consequently will not retain followers in the long run. The application of violence is a sign that they have run out of options, not of substantial power (Ruthven 2000: 370). Western scholars like Gilles Kepel or Olivier Roy have uttered similar predictions (Kepel 2003; Roy 1996, 2004).

Generally speaking, terrorism of whatever kind has never been very successful in bringing about long-term political change (Hoffman 2001:83). By contrast, ethno-nationalism has a comparatively »good« record. However, the new, more cunning doctrine of Al-Qaeda could shift the balance in the long run. The bombings shortly before the elections in Spain in March 2004 could be a first sign (Der Spiegel 19.03.04).

Nevertheless, both ideologies – ethno-nationalism and religious fundamentalism – suffer from reductionism and absolutism: reductionism of political concepts and world views; absolutism in violence and »moral« legitimation. Nationalism, especially in its integral form, has often and

rightly been described as a modern religion or substitute for religion. This makes the two phenomena even more comparable.

In this sense some scholars have certified ethno-nationalism as »almost pathological [in] character,« as Benedict Anderson puts it. The whole point of the nation is that it is interestless. For that very reason, it can ask for sacrifices without material compensation. Social and economic theories cannot explain »[the] attachment that peoples feel for the inventions of their imaginations – or … why people are ready to die for these inventions« (Anderson 1991: 141, 144). Donald Horowitz writes that the emotions in »ethnic conflicts« cannot be grasped by rational theories (Horowitz 1985: 131–134). Anthony Smith agrees: no rational-choice approach could explain why people fight for sometimes entirely hopeless causes (Smith 1995:40). Karl Deutsch traces this delusion to a cognitive vicious circle: »The feedback information on the consequences of one's behavior gets superimposed and suppressed. Hence, extreme nationalism leads to an epistemological catastrophe. Emaciation and paralysis of the cognitive faculties are the consequences« (Deutsch, in: Winkler 1985: 51).

These features apply equally to militant religious fundamentalism. They entail a higher readiness to use brute force in order to reach a goal, which has contributed to an increase in barbarism and civilian victims in comparison to conventional warfare. The asymmetry of the combatants – ethno-national activists and religious fundamentalists against states – and of their political rationalities has removed the limits on violence and blurred the lines between war and peace (Münkler 2002: 57ff).

So-called ethnic conflicts have claimed millions of civilian lives since the end of the Cold War (more than 200,000 in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995, and about 800,000 in Rwanda in 1994), while the number of victims of terrorism motivated by religious fanaticism tends to be higher than the number claimed by terrorists of other ideologies (Hoffman 2001: 121). »Ethnicity« and »terrorism« have also formed alliances, although rarely »ethnicity« and religious fundamentalism (Pakistan is an example).

Since as early as 11/9 (see above), not only 9/11, the world has witnessed a dangerous erosion of common codes of conduct, an attrition of international law, particularly the law of war dating from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The old conventions have lost their cogency and normative power in the new contexts. This is a remarkable tendency compared to the period characterized by the Westphalian model of nation-states.

Ernst-Otto Czempiel makes a dialectical connection between ethno-national civil wars and militant Islamic fundamentalism: »War … has largely disappeared from the international system, and violence in the form of civil wars has penetrated the states. From there, however, it is now coming back into the international system in the form of terrorism« (Czempiel 2002: 39). Taking it one step further one could say: In the »paradigm of ethnicity« the state is undermined from »below,« while in the »paradigm of terrorism« it is attacked from »above« (while the operational structures of terrorism consist of supra-state and sub-state elements at the same time). However, both attack the state.

Political reactions and military responses to the two phenomena have been very different. Whereas in the face of »ethnic conflict« international actors have shown much confusion and hesitation, and, if they have taken any action at all, have preferred soft approaches, such as UN peace-keeping missions (that often failed, as in Srebrenica or Rwanda), the answers to international acts of terrorism after 9/11 have been purely military, strong, decisive, and »paucilateral.«[2] The latter have also been widely criticized as over-reactions and »collective punishment,« particularly the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. Given the fact that »ethnic conflicts« so far have claimed many lives in comparison to even the most atrocious terrorist attacks, this might appear surprising, although less so at second glance: the victims of »ethnic conflicts« are generally limited to citizens of the troubled countries, that is, the conflict is territorially limited (apart from the refugee problem). The victims of terrorism, however, are mostly citizens of Western countries, and the conflict is potentially ubiquitous.

The socio-political reasons for and recruitment strategies of »ethnic conflict« and Islamic fundamentalism again show similarities. Activists appeal to poorer, less educated masses as their political constituency. The leaders themselves, however, mostly stem from urban, well-educated middle-class and often intellectual milieus. Although the ideologies are strongly and necessarily nurtured from cultural and religious or quasi-religious sources, they strive for exclusive political aims. Therefore, fighting them solely on the political level is not a remedy.

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2. I would like to introduce this term as something between unilateral and multilateral. It means a »coalition of the few« and thus also expresses something inadequate (taking its Latin connotations), in contrast to the word »plurilateral« which is sometimes used in international law in the context of WTO negotiations and procedures.

»Ethnic conflicts« are, among other things, a result of state failure and often, but not always, a consequence of economic discrepancies. International terrorism results to a higher degree from both state failure and the failure of society to cope with modernity. Herbert Kitschelt argues that international terrorism is less a product of Islam than of regional factors that apply particularly to the Middle East, such as predatory authoritarian rule, statism, social and economic exclusion, poor economic growth, and public institutions that do not support the development of viable capitalist markets (in contrast to Muslim countries in Asia) (Kitschelt 2004: 159–188).

Looking at practical examples, the results appear bleak for those who are still in search of a new paradigm in international politics after 9/11.

## Iraq and other Examples

One example is Iraq. The predominantly Anglo-American war in March and April 2003 was a direct consequence of 9/11, at least according to its initiators. What has happened in Iraq since then, however, is the ethnicization of politics, a familiar phenomenon that reminds us of the darkest chapters of ethno-national politics and flawed »conflict resolution« in Bosnia, Lebanon, and – in colonial times – 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 come to characterize pluralism in the Middle East if the us administration continues to pursue the policy of playing religious and ethnic groups against each other, as has been the case in Iraq since long before the war (Salama, in: Al-Ahram Weekly 2/3–9/05).

After the war, the attempt to reconstruct Iraqi political institutions was short-sighted and stuck within the same paradigm, without any profound socio-political reflection. The composition of the Iraqi Governing Council was based, of all things, on ethnic and religious grounds, at least predominantly. The alternative would have been a clear emphasis, in both politics and the media, on social forces such as trade unions, women, peasants, communists, liberals, conservatives, perhaps leavened by regional representatives. 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 was from the Iraqi Women's Organization (Songhul Chapouk), they were listed as a Shi'ite and a Turco-

man, respectively.³ This misconception has helped to reinforce primordial and parochial alignments that found their most recent expression in the first elections in January 2005.

The composition of the interim cabinet, created in September 2003, followed the same rationale: among the ministers were 14 Sh'ia, 5 Sunni, 5 Kurds, and one Assyrian. Both the Shi'ite and the Sunni numbered a Turcoman. Although cross-cutting »ethnic« ascriptions are generally helpful since they tend to run against the cleavages of ethno-national conflicts, the starting point is fundamentally flawed.

This context provides grounds for primordial groups feeling neglected vis-à-vis the others. In such a fragile situation it is almost impossible to get it right. What was true of the Balkans is true of Iraq. The Iraqi Council of Sunni Ulema, for example, accused the US administration of trying to marginalize the Sunnis, criticizing the composition of the Governing Council as underrepresenting the Sunnis. Indeed, US strategists have put their hopes primarily in the once suppressed Shi'ite community that makes up about two-thirds of the population. Then the Kurds demanded their »just« political share after decades of suffering and obtained it, together with the Sunnis, with Jalal Talabani being appointed the »Kurdish and Sunni president« of Iraq who promised to endorse »a Sunni voice« in the new constitution. By way of balance, a Shi'ite, Ibrahim Jaafari, became prime minister. There is no way out of this paradigm. Political claims can be articulated only by ethno-national representatives. There is no room for trans- or supra-ethnic political forces.

After a war like the one in Iraq, with complete regime collapse, followed by 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 make possible setting the points in a new direction. This could have been a step in the direction of a democratic state with the development of civil society, which suffered so much under Saddam Hussein.

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3. The Governing Council, as chosen by the US administration in July 2003, was made up of 25 people: 13 members were Shi'ite, five Kurdish (most 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 ….«

Of course, religious and other primordial elements would inevitably have pushed their way into politics, especially after decades of unjust distribution of resources and political power. But when, if not after a war, is there likely to be such an opportunity to at least try to escape the »paradigm of ethnicity«? This opportunity was definitely missed. The present situation in Iraq shows that the consequences will be long felt.

Conceptually, the »paradigm of ethnicity« moves in a vicious circle: it is self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing. Practically, it tends to create a political chain reaction. Bloody suicide attacks against Shi'ite pilgrims and clerics, and clashes between Shi'ite and Sunni gangs are part of this logic. Of course, this development has now acquired an auto-dynamic for which US foreign policy can no longer be blamed. It has become a deliberate strategy of radicals – above all, of militant Sunni fundamentalists – to stir up »ethnic« uproar in order to raise the costs for the American occupiers.[4]

A new dimension of civil war opened up with the bombing of a Kurdish party office in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk at the beginning of February 2004. For the first time, terrorists in Iraq attacked an »ethnic« group's political leadership. Kurdish striving for a state and Arab counterreactions are also fuelled by the provisional Iraqi constitution. Its provisions correspond with the ethno-national paradigm. They recognize far reaching autonomy for the three northern Kurdish provinces as a single political body, as well as its Kurdish political leadership. Arabs and Turcomans, in turn, have repeatedly demonstrated against Sunni Arabs and a federal constitution. The population is polarizing.

According to the French Iraq expert Pierre-Jean Luizard, there is even talk of building a wall through Kirkuk along ethnic lines. This is reminiscent of ideas floated in Sarajevo during the early 1990s. »Radical Kurds aim at ethnic cleansing in the north,« he said. To some extent, this is already taking place by itself since more and more Arabs are moving south. A Kurdish state is the final goal.[5]

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4. In January 2004 US troops said they had found a computer disk with a letter from the supposed Jordanian Al-Qaeda member Abu Musab Al-Sarkawi. It called for suicide attacks against Shi'ites in order to spark a civil war. »Der Mann, der den Bürgerkrieg im Irak schürt,« in: *Spiegel online*, March 4, 2004.

5. The 173rd US Airborne Brigade, which controls the area, estimates that the population in and around Kirkuk is presently 35 percent Arab, 35 percent Kurd, 26 percent Turcoman and 4 percent other. These numbers are shifting daily (»Governing Council Parties Are Said to Back Broad Autonomy for Kurds,« in *New York Times*, Jan. 10, 2004).

According to an Israeli source reported by the Arab media, Israel would endorse the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq (Al-Hayat 2/26/04). Other reports are more skeptical and say that some senior White House officials are reluctant to divide a federal Iraq along »ethnic« lines. Regional allies of the United States like Turkey and Saudi Arabia have also chafed at this idea, for reasons related to their own concerns about »ethnic« and religious nationalism (New York Times 1/10/04; Al-Ahram Weekly 2/3–9/05).

This insight may come too late, however. The repercussions of this failed state-building approach can now be felt across the borders, too. Robert Rotberg, president of the World Peace Foundation, concedes that in the wake of the Iraq war the Middle East could become even more insecure than before, especially if separatist forces prevail in Iraq.[6]

The ethno-national chain reaction reached neighboring Syria in mid March 2004. The first bloody riots between Kurds and security forces broke out in several cities after Arab and Kurdish fans had clashed in a stadium before a soccer game in the northern city of Qamishli. Even Syrian Kurdish party leaders admitted that they had lost control over their own constituency. Some Kurds have their own history of grievances against the Syrian Baath regime.[7] However, current influences are clearly coming from across the border.

The Baath regime in Syria has run on a ticket of Pan-Arab nationalism and Syrian unity rather than factionalism. For all its practical insufficiencies and theoretical imperfections it has been an (oppressive) umbrella against political factionalism organized along »ethnic« and »religious« lines.[8] In Iraq, similar ideological foundations existed although they were

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6. Robert I. Rotberg, »Herausforderungen an die Weltordnung: Staatenbildung in Zeiten des Terrors,« in: *Internationale Politik*, Vol. 11, Nov. 30, 2003.

7. The majority of the 1.5 to 2 million Syrian Kurds enjoy equal rights and are well integrated into Syrian society, particularly in the big cities. However, 200,000 Kurds have been denied Syrian citizenship, the right to own land, and so on, since the 1960s. The Kurdish areas in the north have been neglected as regards public investment and infrastructure. Official use of the Kurdish language in schools, and so on, is forbidden.

8. This general statement holds true in political and social practice, despite the fact that the Kurds are conceptually excluded by the pan-Arab idea which is ethno-national in nature. However, the Kurds are included in the idea of Syrian unity. Secondly, although in Syria parts of the Alawi minority form the backbone of the regime, this does not make it an »Alawi regime« with an »ethnic« agenda. See also Lobmeyer 1995:207ff; Wieland 2004.

increasingly contradicted by Saddam Hussein's cruel stance towards the Kurds and the fact that he dropped secularism from his Baathist agenda after the Gulf War in 1991, while more and more openly courting his Sunni constituency.

The US administration in Iraq, however, with no visible attempt to resist developments, has finally allowed the Pandora's Box to open and has cleared the way for the »paradigm of ethnicity.« Neither Baath ideology nor the US approach leave any room for the development of civil society and a civil-democratic notion of the state.

The second example is also a direct consequence of 9/11. The war in Afghanistan has not led to a satisfying outcome. The situation is somewhat different, however, because unlike in Iraq there has not been a strong centralized state for many decades. Warlords and »ethnic« factionalism have ruled daily life before and since the US bombings of October 2001. Again, it was the support of Western actors that helped these forces to grow and flourish. Here Islamic fundamentalism and ethno-political factionalism have developed concurrently. Radical Mujaheddin were armed by the USA as proxies in a war against the Soviet Union. When the socialist threat had gone, the factions started fighting each other with increasing violence and religious zealotry.

Since 9/11 nothing much has changed. The Taliban are gone but factionalism runs high. Of course, the war in Afghanistan was less overwhelming than in Iraq, and the Western forces have no comparable administrative powers, least of all in the barely accessible countryside. Still, the lack of a sweeping political concept or will to engage more substantially after the war have helped to strengthen the »ethnicity paradigm« in Afghanistan.

Similar to Iraq, government members in Kabul are referred to according to their »ethnic« affiliation. More than 60 percent of the population in Afghanistan is Pashtoon, known locally as Pathan. The rest are Tajik, Uzbek, and Shi'ite. Many Pathans supported the Taliban. With the Northern Alliance in power, mostly composed of minority groups, stories are increasingly coming through of Pathans being killed by warlords and anti-Taliban forces. One journalist even put it as follows: »The numbers may be small but in any other war this would be called ethnic cleansing« (The Ecologist 11/27/04). Although this term should not be used lightly, especially if there is no territorial ethno-national concept behind it, it shows the direction of current developments. The country is a patchwork of different fiefdoms along »ethnic« cleavages and still a hideout for

Al-Qaeda terrorists. A convincing and realistic counter-concept is nowhere in sight.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan openly warned against failure in Afghanistan, and the new NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said that NATO could not afford to lose Afghanistan: »This would mean that we would lose the fight against terrorism« (Spiegel online 2/7/04).

## What Primordialism Does to a »World of Societies«

These examples show that »ethnic conflict« and »international terrorism« after 9/11 tend to develop hand in hand rather than replace one another. The world is caught in a vicious circle: an unstable society and polity torn apart by ethno-national activists is a fertile operating ground for Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists. And countries that are alleged to support terrorism are bombed and administered into »ethnic conflict.« As much as a liaison between Al-Qaida and Iraq was an invention of British and American secret services and governments, it has become a self-fulfilling prophecy after the war against Saddam Hussein.[9]

> The rise of primordialism, the political polarization of populations, and the weakening of existing state structures in troubled areas are common outcomes of ethno-nationalism and Islamic fundamentalist terrorism.

This dialectical development undermines existing statehood and suffocates any form of civil society. In weak states after a conflict characterized by the »ethnicity paradigm,« like Lebanon, it is mostly conservative primordial groups that have taken over public tasks that the state is unable to manage (it is important not to confuse this with an active civil society in which each person can choose to take part or not). The same thing has started in Iraq where religious organizations have taken over social functions such as running hospitals, public security, or feeding the poor. Religious leaders are in the process of establishing effective parallel pow-

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9. The president of the German Intelligence Service (BND), August Hanning, shares the concern that »Iraq could develop into a centre of Islamic extremism.« He said that the country could follow a similar path to Afghanistan in the 1980s when the mujaheddin fought against the Russian occupation, and Islamic fundamentalism flourished (*Spiegel online* 23.09.03).

ers (Die Zeit 18/2003). Iraq is therefore another state with once strong institutions which is showing signs of becoming a »weak state« and could even become a »failed state,« according to Rotberg's classification (Rothberg 2003).

In conclusion, the rise of primordialism, the political polarization of populations, and the weakening of existing state structures in troubled areas are common outcomes of ethno-nationalism and Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. Conflicts and possible« conflict solutions are progressively eluding the frameworks and competences of the state. The change of paradigm that took place in world politics on 11/9 is distinct. But what followed? In contrast to the »nation-state paradigm« before 11/9 some have suggested the »paradigm of civilizations,« most outstandingly Samuel Huntington (Huntington 1996). In this sense, small and rather static state units and political alliances are losing importance as main political actors vis-à-vis bigger and more amorphous units with predominantly religious and cultural contents.

However, this »clash of civilizations« has so far not occurred. Alliances have remained political and cross-civilizational. At best, this idea could become a self-fulfilling prophecy if enough people came to make it an issue. However, while the hot rhetoric in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 could have favored Huntington supporters, the escalation of the »war on terror« with the Anglo-American attack on Iraq refuted this thesis. Muslim Arabs in the Middle East have noted the major cleavage running through »the West,« with, in particular, France, Germany, and the Pope opposing the war. Arab Christians and Muslims, as well as many, mostly Christian, Europeans were in one camp, with, mostly Christian, US Americans and some Christian Europeans in the other. This silenced Islamist demagogues who would have liked to denounce this war as the West's new crusade against Islam.

In the discussion of paradigms Czempiel, unlike Huntington, proposed the term »world of societies« (Gesellschaftswelt) as opposed to world of states (Staatenwelt) and ideological block confrontation (Czempiel 2001: 15ff). The processes of emancipation, education, information, participation, and democratization that characterize this new world were already taking shape in the middle of the twentieth century under the cover of nation states and burst open after 11/9. This world of societies has also changed the means and the logic of foreign policy with the rising influence of transnational cooperation and non-governmental organizations.

This is a very useful and, at the same time, very optimistic description. However, Czempiel has recognized a setback in recent years. In the second half of the Clinton administration and since George W. Bush took office, the signs are again pointing backwards to the logic of absolute sovereignty and military solutions within the framework of a world of states. Tools such as global economic networking, and social and environmental issues as a preoccupation of foreign policy have been sidelined.

When we look at the developments described above in the discussion of ethno-nationalism and militant Islamic fundamentalism, it reminds us less of the characteristics of society (Gesellschaft) than those of community (Gemeinschaft). The former is a free and voluntary association of individuals, the latter a bond of organic life, an a priori »unity of will,« as Tönnies wrote in 1887. In a »society« no activities take place »which can be traced from a unity that exists a priori and necessarily« (Tönnies 1887: 3,40).

This leads us back to the fundamental common denominator of both ethno-nationalism and religious fundamentalism: 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 case of an »ethnic conflict« or a terrorist attack this external ascription can mean life or death.

In philosophical terms this expresses the bankruptcy of humanism. Not only is the unimpeachable moral value of human beings increasingly being ignored in the conflicts and conceptions that have dominated since 11/9 but also their moral equality, regardless of religious conviction or descent, as well as the freedom of individual choice. People are not judged according to what they think but on what they »are« by birth. Groups or »nations« are not defined on the basis of a common discourse, as in the Enlightenment, but on a priori ascriptions and assumptions. This represents the eclipse of *ratio* in international politics and the prevalence of *origo*.

The hopes that emerged in the first months and years after 11/9 have not been fulfilled. When the Wall came down in Berlin in 1989, two potential paradigms opened up: one was the paradigm of humanism and the other the paradigm of primordialism.

In this context I hold that the term »primordialism« comprises both »ethnicity« and religion, and thus also religious fundamentalism. For religious fundamentalists, religion is as unchangeable as the features of ethnic origin. Also in the political debate, especially during »ethnic conflicts,« no difference is made at all.

Therefore, »ethnicity« and Islamic fundamentalist terrorism could be called sub-paradigms of the paradigm of primordialism. The term »humanism,« apart from its philosophical connotations, also stands for political conceptions of democratic peace, individual and political freedom, human rights, and the right to freely change one's ascription(s). In the context of conflict solutions it means the promotion of a strong civil society, a civil-democratic understanding of the nation, and political institutions that reflect and respond to discursive and rational demands. In the present setting, the concept of the European Union is a valuable counter-trend against the paradigm of primordialism, although after its expansion it will have to digest a large chunk of ethno-national traditions from Eastern Europe within its borders.

Overall, however, today's world rather resembles a world of communities than a world of societies. Conflicts and conflict solutions are caught up in the paradigm of primordialism. Primordial elements are not entirely new as regards their influence on political and ideological concepts, but they have become a dominant paradigm in international politics. The optimistic spirit that initially gained ground after 11/9 makes this contrast even harsher.

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