

Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung
Center for European Integration Studies
Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

**European Integration and
South Eastern Europe**

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**Nationalism, Regional
Multiculturalism and
Democracy**

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Preface

This publication is part of a series which was established in 2001 in order to make available teaching and learning material specifically for European Studies programmes throughout South Eastern Europe. The series makes public the results of research projects conducted in the framework of the “Network for ‘European Studies in South Eastern Europe’” which is one of the major undertakings of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. The Network was founded in January 2000 and now comprises almost 40 universities and institutes both from South Eastern and Western Europe. It aims at establishing and strengthening interdisciplinary European Studies in the region by

- holding yearly conferences in the countries of the region
- organizing working groups on different topics
- giving advice in curricula development
- sending a Flying Faculty for teaching at European Studies Centers
- holding Train the Trainer seminars
- establishing Regional European Studies Centers
- providing a database of all programmes in the region, and
- publishing teaching and learning material.

These activities are mainly financed by the German national budget for the Stability Pact, in close cooperation with partners like the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German Rector’s Conference, the German Academic Exchange Service and the Hertie Foundation. Several publications of the series like this one have been designed as Readers. The goal is to support European Studies programmes in the region with easily accessible, academically profound literature on those topics of the European integration process, which have a special relevance for the region. The philosophy is based on the dual experience that only very few faculties in South Eastern Europe have sufficient literature on European integration at all and that

if they have such literature it reflects predominantly the West European viewpoint. Thus, there is a need for a new kind of literature, duly reflecting the needs and the experiences of the region.

The guiding principles for these Readers are as follows:

- The topics chosen are of major future importance for the region.
- Only topics with relevance for the region as a whole are selected.
- Renowned, trans-nationally respected experts are chosen as authors.
- Authors are asked to concentrate on basic knowledge for M.A. level.
- The Readers are designed for professors and students alike for practical use in seminars.
- The goal is to get authors from all countries of the region.
- The Readers are available for free on the Homepage of ZEI <http://www.zei.de/> for downloading.

The Readers all have the same format: They start with a text written by a well-known West European author. The text is selected by a distinguished South East European author who then offers a response reflecting the experience made in the region, some didactical questions which might be discussed in class, and finally a list of basic literature. While there is a thorough review process for each publication by the two editors, the Reader nevertheless reflects exclusively the views of the author. We hope that these texts will contribute to a better understanding of the European integration process among the young generation in South Eastern Europe and to a more substantial dialogue among scholars from the region and from EU countries.

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Multiculturalism and culturalism

A social scientific critique of the political philosophy of multiculturalism

Introduction¹

During the last decade, the question of ethno-cultural diversity has been a central and perhaps even dominant theme in political philosophy.² “Multiculturalism” became a position that was advanced as the answer by a large number of political philosophers, who argued that the problematic of multicultural societies required a reconsideration of the established concepts and arguments of political philosophy. Some even argued that the question of cultural diversity requires the introduction of new concepts and arguments.

At the same time, debates among social scientists took a rather different, if not completely opposite turn. Increasingly, the idea of multiculturalism was criticized for its essentialist notions of identity, its static vision of culture, its primordialist understanding of ethnicity and its homogenizing treatment of ethnic groups. So while political philosophers felt that they had neglected and underestimated the importance of culture, and started to

- 1 Reprint with the friendly permission of the authors. The paper which was not published yet was presented at the EUROConference “Democracy Beyond the Nation-State: Perspectives on Post-National order”, Athens, October 5 – 7, 2000.
- 2 Political philosophy is of course not the only normative discipline where multiculturalism is discussed. Also within general ethics and the more specialized disciplines as medical ethics, multiculturalism has been an intensively discussed topic. In this paper, we shall however primarily limit ourselves to the debate over multiculturalism in political philosophy.

argue for the “right to culture”, social scientists felt that the idea of culture had become more impeding than illuminating, and started “writing against culture”.

We strongly feel that these critical perspectives from the social sciences are of major importance for the debate over multiculturalism in political philosophy. But until now, these two debates have not been fruitfully connected. The obvious huge disciplinary gap between normative and social scientific theories has often prevented any exchange at all. In this article we shall attempt to break through this unfruitful situation, and try to show why and how the critique of multiculturalism from the social sciences is important for multiculturalism as a political philosophy.

This objective immediately poses the question of the relation between the social sciences and normative disciplines. How do we view the connection between “facts” and “values”? And what is our position in the debate between the proponents of contextual and those of abstract normative theories? Such questions are interesting, but not relevant to our purposes. For we think that there are at least two contributions of social scientific knowledge to normative theorizing that everyone can easily endorse. Firstly, social-scientific knowledge can contribute to a better understanding of what normative theorists pose as a problem (i.c. cultural diversity or the multicultural society). Secondly, in as far as normative considerations and arguments rely upon ideas about social reality (i.c. empirical, conceptual and theoretical notions of culture, ethnicity and identity), these ideas should be at least plausible from a social scientific point of view. After a discussion of our social scientific perspective on the concepts of culture, ethnicity and identity in relation to multiculturalism, we shall in the subsequent paragraphs explain these two points respectively.

The debate over multiculturalism addresses a large range of themes and questions that we cannot deal with exhaustively. We shall therefore limit ourselves in two ways. Firstly, we will primarily discuss the philosophy of multiculturalism as an answer to ethno-cultural diversity, and largely leave aside questions of socio-economic and legal-political (in)equality between ethnic groups. Secondly, multiculturalism is sometimes presented as an

answer to cultural diversity in its broadest sense. Here we will limit ourselves to multiculturalism as an answer to cultural diversity as a result of immigration.

A last remark should be made in advance in order to avoid any misunderstanding of our intentions. Although the philosophy of multiculturalism is our object of critique, the reader should not be misled to believe that we in any way support its political counterparts. Indeed, had it not already been done so often, we could have made more or less the same critical arguments against conservative, assimilationist or nationalist ideologies. If we criticize the philosophy of multiculturalism, we do so from an initial sympathetic attitude towards the considerations and intentions at stake, and sometimes even in complete support of the normative conclusions reached. It is rather the way these conclusions are reached that deserves sociological scrutiny. In the last section we shall therefore offer some suggestions for a better understanding of the “problematic of multicultural societies”, ways of normative arguing and finding practical solutions that do not only stand the test of fairness and ethical persuasiveness, but also that of sociological sensitivity.

1. Culture, ethnicity and the multicultural misunderstandings

What are then our objections to the way culture, ethnicity and identity are frequently understood in multiculturalism? For our purposes, we shall here limit ourselves to three related “multiculturalist misunderstandings”: (1) the idea that ethnic identities are “objectively given” and all-encompassing, (2) a culturalistic understanding the concept of culture and as a result of this (3) the equation of culture with ethnicity. Before we discuss more extensively why and how these misunderstandings undermine many current philosophical defenses of multiculturalism, let us first explain these objections themselves.

Ethnic identity

Since the late sixties, social scientists have come to distinguish the concept of culture from ethnicity. The importance of this distinction is now generally accepted, and is not confined to (extreme) constructionist theories, as some (e.g. Musschenga 1998: 207-208) still maintain. However, multiculturalists and normative theorists often fail to make this distinction, or even reject it. Appiah (1997) considers this as *the* multiculturalist misunderstanding. The importance to do make this distinction was recognized when in the 1960's the world witnessed a revival of ethnic and nationalist movements. This made clear that – contrary to both the liberal and Marxist expectancies – the processes of modernization, state formation and nation building had not led to the end of ethnic conflicts. The revival challenged functionalist approaches that basically considered nations and ethnic groups as resulting from and rooted in objective cultural identities.³ Ernest Gellner was among the first to recognize this. As he put it in his essay on nationalism from 1969: “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist – but it does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on” (1969: 168). In other words, theorists began to realize that “ethnic solidarity might have a good deal in common with the phenomenon of political mobilization”, as Hechter (1975: 314) put it.

We understand ethnic identity as a social identity that is characterized by a belief in a common culture, shared history and common descent.⁴ Identity

3 For the emergence of the concept of ethnicity, see esp. Glazer & Moynihan 1975. Two remarks are in order. First, the notion of an ethnic group already existed before. And second, also the need to distinguish ethnicity from culture had already been recognized, especially by Max Weber (1968: 389; cf. Hechter 1976; Vermeulen & Govers 1997: 5).

4 We thus consider self-ascription to be the basic feature of ethnicity. Ethnicity may then be equated with ethnic identity. This understanding is quite broadly accepted since the 1970's (see e.g. DeVos 1975: 16-17; Enloe 1973: 16; Patterson 1975: 309) and is distinguished from the mainstream understanding of ethnicity (still to be found in most dictionaries) as the sum of a number of objective features such as a common history, language, ancestry or religion. Our definition does leave room for

is here thus defined as a subjective category.⁵ Probably the most distinctive feature of ethnic identity is the kinship metaphor (Roosens 1994), that has also been described as “a myth of collective ancestry” (Horowitz 1985: 52), or as “an ideology of common substance” that tends to confuse biology with transmission of heritage (Wolf 1988: 27). Characteristic of ethnic ideologies is a preoccupation with ancestry and roots, or, as Hollinger has put it, with the “will to descend” (1997).

The distinction between culture and ethnicity is based upon the understanding that one should make an analytic distinction between the givens of culture, history and descent on the one hand, and the way these are imagined in the construction of a community on the other. The distinction thus primarily serves to study the variable relation between on the one hand identity, and on the other hand culture, history and origins. There can for example exist a huge gap between what scholars actually believe to know about a history of a given nation and what a majority of the population and nationalist historiography presents as truth. Danforth (1995) for example presents three versions of Macedonian history: a Macedonian one, a Greek one and a scholarly one, which is his own.

So knowledge about the history, culture and origins of an ethnic group is not objective or free from interpretation. On the other hand, ethnic identities are not completely detached from the facts, as is sometimes suggested in (extreme) constructionist approaches.⁶ The extent to which ethnic identities are optional and malleable varies. Verdery (1994) demonstrates for example that, as a result of divergent processes of state formation, ethnic identities are more malleable in the peripheries of Europe

a distinction between ethnic identity as group consciousness and ethnicity as group formation or cohesion (Hechter 1975) or as the ‘social organization of culture difference’ (Barth 1969).

5 Sometimes the term ethnicity is applied synonymously to ethnic group. According to us, it is more correct to consider ethnicity as an abstract and theoretical concept, referring to that what makes an ethnic group. An ethnic group thus is distinct from other groups in the way it is imagined as a community (cf. Anderson 1983).

than in Western Europe. In a similar way, the research conducted by Waters (1990) in the United States shows that while for the descendants of European immigrants from mixed origins ethnic identity is to a large extent optional, this does not apply to the same extent and in the same manner for American blacks.⁷

In the debate on multiculturalism, ethnic identity is often understood as synonymous to cultural identity. But the need to distinguish the two follows logically from the distinction between culture and ethnicity. Cultural identity thereby does not differ very much from culture (Vermeulen 1984: 12-14). The word identity here only emphasizes the characteristics of a specific culture, or draws attention to that what makes it different from others. The difference between cultural identity and ethnic identity also has to do with the different meanings of identity in the two expressions. In the former, identity means – as in mathematics and logic – being identical to.

In the latter, identity has the more social-psychological denotation of identification.

As a social identity, ethnic identity is but one identity besides other social identities, which may be based upon gender, age, region, religion, profession, status or class. This should be noticed, for in the multiculturalism debate there is a tendency to refer to identity only in the sense of ethnic identity. The reason to do so is usually the assumption that ethnic identity is a more important and fundamental identity than others, or even that it is an all – encompassing identity. This assumption is – although widely shared-broadly speaking certainly not true.

6 Critiques of such postmodern-contructionist understandings of identity are to be found in Billig's essay *Postmodernity and identity* (Billig 1995: 128 – 154) and Vermeulen & Govers (1997: 19 – 22).

7 Cf. the classical essay on symbolic ethnicity by Gans (1979).

Culture and culturalism

Now that we have defined ethnicity and distinguished it from culture, it is time to turn to culture itself. We would prefer to adopt the rather straightforward definition by Löfgren (1981: 30) who defines culture as “the common world of experiences, values and knowledge that a certain social group constitutes”. At first, the word “common” may seem problematic, since modern notions of culture rather understand cultures as “contested fields” (Verdery 1994: 42) and emphasize their internal diversity or the “organization of difference” rather than commonality (e.g. Hannerz 1992: 4-15; Wallace 1966: 84-92).⁸ Two remarks are therefore in order. First, the definition does not restrict the concept of culture to ethnic or national units. Once we then realize that people take part in many different social units, the problem of commonality versus diversity is largely solved. To speak for example of “Turkish culture” in terms of commonality is then not so say that all Turks share a common culture. Second, in this definition, tradition and homogeneity do not take precedence a priori above change and heterogeneity. Therefore, culture is a field of both commonality *and* diversity, and of both continuity *and* change.

The way culture is conceptualized and understood by many political philosophers suffers from a notion of culture that is in almost every respect in complete contrast to our understanding, and which can generally be characterized as culturalistic.⁹ By this is meant a vision that treats cultures as sharply defined homogenous, integrated and relatively static units. This vision is often accompanied by what one calls essentialism. This refers to the idea that cultures have an “essence”, “character” or even a “soul”. Changes and transformations of cultures are interpreted as superficial: cultures may absorb new and “foreign” elements, but they adopt these to their own character. So “essentially” they do not change. Such essentialism usually

8 For recent anthropological views on the concept of culture, see e.g. Keesing 1994 and Vayda 1994.

9 Already in 1959 Bidney extensively criticized culturalism. For an overview of this critique see Vermeulen 1992, 1999a & b.

also implies a reification of culture: culture is presented as a collective individual (Handler 1988) and organicistic metaphors are frequently applied. Lastly, a culturalistic vision usually treats culture as an autonomous field, more or less independent from political or economical structures.

This culturalistic vision of culture is in a way a congenital defect. As the anthropologist, Eric Wolff reminds us:

“We need to remember that the culture concept came to the fore in a specific historical context, during a period when some European nations were contending for dominance while others were striving for separate identities and independence. The demonstration that each struggling nation possessed a distinctive society animated by its special spirit or culture served to legitimate its aspirations to form a separate state of its own. The notion of separate and integral cultures responded to this political project. (1982: 387)”

The ‘strive for separate identity’ in Germany especially provided the breeding ground. The German philosopher Herder may be considered as the founding father of the modern notion of culture. Herder developed ideas about the unique and intrinsic values of cultures, and argued that every nation deserved its own state and could develop its culture. Through the German anthropologist Boas, this Herderian culture concept was introduced in universities of the United States, where it in many ways replaced the idea of race.

Culturalistic notions played an important ideological role in the process of nation-building from the late 19th century on, a process that was characterized by monoculturalism and an intolerance of difference (see Billig 1995; Goldberg 1994). The humanities – archeology, history, folk studies and the social sciences – played an important role in demonstrating the continuity, homogeneity and unity of national cultures. Related to this is the dominance of the theoretical perspective of structural-functionalism and assimilationist theories until the end of the Second World War (Esman 1994: 5). Structural – functionalists strongly emphasized the integration of cultures and societies, and often neglected external influences on the social units they studied, whether these were villages, tribes or nation-states. Richard Handler (1993: 68) even goes as far as to state that “until recently, social scientists and nationalists spoke the same language.”

Culturalistic nations are then not only unsuited for multiculturalism because of their sociological impracticability, but also because of its ideological roots in nationalism. Multiculturalism may be a critical reaction to the strive for cultural homogeneity inherent in nationalism, by its often implied culturalism it threatens only to transmit nationalist ideas to the sub-national level. In the same spirit, Dennis Wrong argues that multiculturalism “in basing itself on relatively permanent groups [...] mirrors the very prejudices it opposes” (Wrong 1997: 298). In fact, culturalism may even make multiculturalism look very much like the ideology of the new right. So Michael Billig writes:

“As Paul Gilroy forcefully argues, there are aspects of multicultural orthodoxy ‘which can be shown to replicate in many ways the *volkish* new right sense of the relationship between race, nation and culture’ (1992a: 57). Unless identity politics can transcend the nation, escaping the bounds of the homeland, the radicalism of the challenge to old images and narratives is critically constrained within the assumptions of nationalism (1995: 148).¹⁰”

Some ideologists of the new right have indeed incorporated elements of the multiculturalist ideology and philosophy. For example, the famous French *nouveau droite* philosopher Alain de Benoist states that he feels strong affinity for Charles Taylor’s *politics of recognition* (Birnbaum 1996). And do we not hear the (distorted) echo’s of multiculturalism in the *Front National* slogan of *droit de différence* (Weil & Crowley 1994; Taguieff 1993: 124)?

Another culturalist flaw of many multiculturalists is their lack of attention for processes of cultural transformation and assimilation as a result of external factors.¹¹ In their *Mistaken identity* (1988: 120-128) Castles, Kalantzis, Cope and Morissey present the example of an immigrant family in Australia who come from a peasant village, and describe what cultural

10 See Gilroy (1992b), Lind (1995: 251 – 257), Roseberry (1992), Schierup (1995) and Vertovec (1996) for further discussion on the resemblance (and sometimes flirtation) between multiculturalism and the ideology the ‘new right’. Also relevant is Verdery’s protest against ‘the new racism and sexism implicit in much identity politics’ (1994: 54).

11 Related to this the fact that social deprivation and cultural identity are often treated as separated phenomena (cf. Vermeulen 1994: 54).

transformation they undergo.¹² One example they mention is the changing perception of time as result of working in a factory. Such cultural transformations are not primarily a result of forced assimilation of a powerless minority by a majority culture. For the most part, it is the result of adaptation to a new social – economical and ecological context, to another time – and worktable, an urban environment and to welfare state arrangements. Besides the impact of political-economical factors on cultural transformation, there is the often underestimated “transformative power of intellectual growth”, as Hymowitz (1992) calls it. Hereby he refers to the cultural impact of the growing importance of schooling and education in modern life. Lastly, there is the transformative power of multiculturalism itself: one might even argue that multiculturalism itself contributes to cultural transformation and even assimilation. It requires, for example, that religious leaders and believers learn to respect other religions and dogmas, thereby relativising their own claims to truths. In de Swaan’s (1994) words, multiculturalism requires “identification with a growing circle”.

2. Multiculturalism and the problematic of multicultural societies

Let us now turn to what this critique means for multiculturalism as a philosophy, and start with the way normative theorists understand their subject: the problematic of multicultural societies. It strikes us that in the many publications on multiculturalism by normative theorists one hardly finds any reflection upon what is presented as the problem to be solved: political conflicts and ethical dilemmas arising from cultural diversity. Often, this problematic is sketched in just a few opening sentences, as if it could be taken for granted. Will Kymlicka’s famous *Multicultural Citizenship* provides a good example. In his introduction he states:

“Most countries today are culturally diverse. According to recent estimates, the world’s 184 independent states contain over 600 language groups, and 5000

12 Cf. the critique of Fincher, Campbell and Webber (1993).

ethnic groups. In very few countries can the citizens be said to share the same language, or belong to the same ethno-national group. This diversity gives rise to a series of important and potentially divisive questions (1995: 1).”

The first two sentences suggest that ethnic diversity may be equated to cultural diversity. Indeed, the word ‘today’ in the first sentence suggests that cultural diversity within states has increased. In the last sentence he suggests that it is this diversity itself that raises questions. The problematic nature of cultural diversity is, so to speak, presented as almost intrinsic to cultural diversity itself. It should not come as a surprise that the author presents multiculturalism as the answer. Kymlicka is no exception, and it may be no coincidence that the word multiculturalism in many texts often refers to both the fact of cultural diversity as well as to the philosophical answer. There seems to be no need to distinguish the two meanings. However, both the fact of cultural diversity itself as the idea that cultural diversity is the problem should be seriously put into perspective and can in some ways even be seriously challenged.

Multiculturalism and cultural diversity

Let us start with the fact of cultural diversity. Is it true that intra – state cultural diversity is an important characteristic of today’s societies, and that indeed this cultural diversity is even increasing? The philosopher and expert by experience Appiah is not impressed by what is often thought of as the most multicultural society of our days, the United States:

“Coming, as I do, from Ghana, I find the broad cultural homogeneity of America more striking than its much – vaunted variety. Take language. When I was a child, we lived in a household where there were always at least three mother tongues in daily use: we spoke English (Ghana’s official language and my mother’s) and Twi (my father’s first language); and our cook and steward, who came from further north, also spoke the language of Navrongo, where they were born. (The watchman spoke Hausa.) Ghana, with a population smaller than that of New York State, has several dozen languages in active daily use and no one language that is spoken at home — or even fluently understood — by a majority of the population. So why, in this society, which has less diversity of culture than most others, are we so preoccupied with diversity and so inclined to conceive of it as cultural?”

Although many authors contrast the current cultural diversity of states with a homogenous past, this notion does not rest on any systematic comparison, and one can even seriously question if it is true at all.

Gellner (1983) points out that in the course of history many languages and ethnic groups have disappeared. In some regions, such as the Balkans, ethno-cultural diversity has decreased drastically; a development that still goes on today (Brubaker 1996 and 1998). Migration does not only lead to ethnic mixing, but also leads to ethnic unmixing, as Brubaker puts it.

Also in the case of immigration countries it is questionable whether immigration has in fact really led to an increase of the cultural diversity of these societies. Especially historians and historical social scientists often object to the picture of a sharp contrast between a cultural homogenous past and a multicultural present. Melleuish (1998: 102) for example is inclined to accept the idea that Australia is nowadays more multicultural, but he strongly objects to the vision of a monocultural past. Collinson (1993) too notices that multiculturalism implicitly affirms the nationalist myth of a monocultural past. Historian David Hollinger (1995) goes even further, and argues that at the beginning of the 20th century the United States were even more culturally diverse than today.

But do we not underestimate the nature and impact of current migration? Do not experts on migration agree that international migration will be a permanent phenomenon? And is it not true that recent migrants to Western countries increasingly come from even more afar, and now also include those who are perceived as racially different? All this is true, but the impact of current immigration on the cultural diversity of the receiving societies should not be overestimated.

In the first place one should not forget that in the past many immigrants that are nowadays considered as belonging to the same (Western or European) culture were then conceived of as culturally different, as difficult to assimilate, and often even as belonging to a different race. In this sense, South and East European immigrants to the United States have only recently become “white” as Appiah (1997) reminds us. Second, we should realize that for several reasons the “stranger” has become more and

more similar to us, as Nauta (1994) has put it. As a result of cultural globalization many immigrants are much more familiar with the culture of the receiving countries than in the past. Current immigrants to the United States from non – European regions are, as Wrong (1997: 299) says, “probably less unfamiliar with the major features of the society than were, say, South Italian or Slavic peasants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century”. Related to this is the worldwide process of increasing deruralization, a process that according to Wallerstein (1999) will be completed within some 25 years. This will have an important cultural impact, as the experience of a peasant life has always been an important source for cultural difference for immigrants. And lastly, the present immigration regulations in many countries add to this that mainly high – educated and wealthy immigrants are admitted. In Australia, for instance, the majority of recent immigrants have a proficiency in English before entry.

Instead of contrasting the homogenous past to a multicultural present, it seems more sensible to contrast the ideology of homogeneity and monoculturalism of the past to the ideology of multiculturalism of today. Whereas the ideology of monoculturalism has neglected or even denied the cultural diversity of the past, the ideology of multiculturalism exaggerates the cultural diversity of the present.

Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition

Normative theorists could agree with our critical comments so far, but they might argue that they are irrelevant for the questions at stake. They might add that, though we have put the current extent of cultural diversity into perspective, we do not deny it all together. And moreover, we miss the politically relevant question. The point at issue, the critics might continue, is that we are confronted with a politics of recognition, a political movement of ethnic minorities striving for recognition of their cultural identities. And the multiculturalists among normative theorists argue that – contrary to the dominant ideology – these demands are justified and require an answer. But again, this could be seriously challenged.

First of all, the support for a politics of recognition among ethnic minority groups should not be overestimated. It is for example striking that in the two countries where multiculturalism became an official government policy – twenty years before it was defended by political philosophers – there was hardly any organized political demand for the idea of multiculturalism. In his detailed study of the origins of the multicultural policies in Australia, Lopez (1997) concludes that “[M]ulticulturalism was not the product of a broad ethnic social movement advocating multiculturalism; successive attempts by multiculturalists to establish a social movement were unsuccessful”. It was a small, but effective lobby of ethnic leaders, social scientists and politicians that was involved in the establishment of multiculturalism. The development of multicultural policies in Canada was quite similar. Although the ethnic leaders who constituted the lobby for multiculturalism presented themselves as representing a *Third Force*, one of the social scientists who was actively involved in the development of the policy in retrospect remarked that ‘[T]he demand for a federal policy of multiculturalism seems to have come primarily from ethnic organizational elites and their supporters, from government agencies and from political authorities’ (Breton 1986: 48).

Second, one could question whether the demand for recognition for one’s cultural identity is actually connected with real cultural differences. When we recall the above mentioned distinction between culture and ethnic identity, we may as Appiah “wonder, in fact, whether there isn’t a connection between the thinning of the cultural content of identities and the rising stridency of their claims” (1997). Or, as Dennis Wrong puts it:

“The rise of multiculturalism does not reflect an increase in the cultural diversity of American society at large, but if anything the reverse. [...] The cultural differences invoked by multiculturalists are fundamentally identity markers or labels rather than ways of life or sets of values that contrast sharply with those of most native-born Americans (Wrong 1997: 299).”

In other words, multiculturalism (as an ideology and movement) may rather be an expression of the need for identity as a result of a decline of real cultural differences, a suggestion that has been put forward by others as well (e.g. Blok 1998; Reitz 1980: 44-35). Social scientific research often affirmed this conclusion. In his study on ethno-regional movements in

France, DeBeer (1980: 115) observed that ethnic leaders in many ways bear more resemblance to leaders of other militant political movements than to their rank and file. They often learned about their own culture, such as their language, at an advanced age (cf. Inghold 1984). Studies of ethnic movements of immigrants often reach the same conclusions. Especially Roosens (1989: 150-151) emphasizes that in order to claim one's own culture as a right, one first needs to distance oneself from that culture, and to be familiar with the standpoint of cultural relativism. Those who live in a relatively stable traditional culture are usually not aware of their difference, let alone that they could value it, or claim it as a right. One should therefore realize that in many cases ethnic movements use the terminology of "culture" and "identity" strategically. In a democratic system that is characterized by a widespread, everyday cultural relativism, demands made with an appeal to culture attain a strong moral appeal to the majority (Roosens 1989). This applies even more to those societies that are familiar with the terminology and ideology of multiculturalism or where it even is an official state ideology and policy like Canada and Australia.

In sum, we seriously challenge the assumptions about what constitutes the problematic of multicultural societies that underlie appeals for multiculturalism. Today's cultural diversity of societies, including those of immigrant countries, should not be overestimated, and calls for recognition of cultural identity should be evaluated critically.¹³ This may seem a form of *Ideologiekritik*, accusing multiculturalists and their philosophical defenders of false consciousness, or at least a form of sociological pedantry towards layman in the field of ethnic studies and the sociology of culture. However, we simply assume that an adequate understanding of political and moral controversies is indispensable for good normative reflection. So a more critical understanding of the reality of "multicultural" societies and the politics of multiculturalism serves a practical purpose for normative theorizing. It may lead to realize that in this debate in many cases culture or

13 Needless to say that this last warning of course also counts for appeals for recognition and protection of national majority cultures.

cultural diversity is not the problem, and therefore “multiculturalism” may not be the solution.

3. *The arguments for multiculturalism*

Multiculturalists do not only reject a policy of forced assimilation of minorities. In fact, almost all normative theorists are in broad agreement over the idea that the established democratic rights would prevent such a policy. Multiculturalists however argue for some form of public recognition of minority cultures, by means of legislation or policies. For that purpose, multiculturalists insist that cultural identity should be conceived of as something that deserves an autonomous moral consideration. Following Kymlicka (1998: 154) we distinguish three kinds of arguments that are put forward by normative theorists. The first one is that cultures have an intrinsic value, the second is that cultural identity is important for individual autonomy, and the third argument we may distinguish stresses the importance of cultural identity for our personal identity.

Intrinsic value

An important argument for “the right to culture” is the idea that cultures and cultural diversity have an intrinsic value. This idea has been – although in different ways – put forward and defended by Dworkin (1993), Raz (1994), Rockefeller (1992) and Taylor (1992). In the Netherlands, especially Musschenga (1998) has defended this idea. The notion of intrinsic value is based upon the idea that the value of something thrusts itself upon us, independent of our assessment. As Dworkin describes it: “Something is intrinsically valuable [...] if its value is *independent* of what people happen to enjoy or want or need or what is good for them. Most of us treat at least some objects or events as intrinsically valuable in that way: we think we should admire and protect them because they are important in themselves, and not just if or because we or others want or enjoy them “ (Dworkin 1993: 71-72, cf. Beauchamps 1991: 138).

The argument that cultures should be valued intrinsically implies a multiculturalism that aims at not just respect for or recognition of cultures, but at their preservation. As such, there are important analogies with the arguments for nature conservation and the preservation of natural species. One frequently encounters biological and organic metaphors. Rockefeller for example argues:

It may be argued that human cultures are themselves like life forms. They are the product of natural evolutionary processes of organic growth. [...] Each has its own place in the larger scheme of things, and each possesses intrinsic value quite apart from whatever value its traditions may have for other cultures. This fact is not altered by the consideration that, like living beings, cultures may develop into disintegrated and diseased forms (Rockefeller 1992: 94).

The intrinsic value of cultures is also often framed in a religious vocabulary. Rockefeller for example argues that cultures may be considered as sacred (1992: 96). Similarly, Taylor writes that he can not rule out the Herderian idea of “divine providence, according to which all this diversity was not a mere accident but was meant to bring about a greater harmony” (1992: 72).

The first problem with this line of reasoning arises with the notion of intrinsic value itself. As an ethical notion, it can of course not be scrutinized sociologically, but only internally. But it seems that most authors in practice do not take cultures to be intrinsically valuable in the sense that their value is independent of our assessment. For if we take cultures to have an intrinsic value, it would follow that they also have an equal value. Most authors, however, reject this conclusion. The earlier cited Rockefeller, for example, speaks of “diseased” cultures. And Raz argues that cultures only have an intrinsic value in as far as they represent true values (1994: 74), thereby excluding reprehensible, “illiberal” cultures. This indicates that, implicitly, the intrinsic value of cultures is not at all “independent”, but indeed dependent upon the philosopher’s evaluation. This also becomes clear by the fact that for many authors the intrinsic value of a culture seems to increase when cultures are rare and peculiar, like pandas have more value than ants for conservationists. Margalit and Halbertal (1994) for example argue that the state has a particular duty to protect cultures that are threatened to disappear, while Musschenga (1998:

222) speaks of a particular duty of the Dutch state to protect cultures “that are alien to them”. This too indicates that the intrinsic value is in fact extrinsic: the value of a culture is determined by the protectionist outsider. As Hannerz rightfully reminds us:

“Watching out for people’s right to choose must not be confused [...] with safeguarding a specific cultural heritage, or cultural diversity generally, for its own sake – the ‘monument to human creativity’ idea. Such safeguarding may be based on a judgment of mostly esthetic and antiquarian nature, and is often based on vicarious pleasure: it often seems to be outsiders who reach such a conclusion, and grieve for the cultures others leave behind (Hannerz 1996: 58).”

Hannerz’ warning brings us to a second objection. Even if one accepts the moral notion that some things may have an intrinsic value, it is highly questionable whether it makes any sense to speak of the intrinsic value of “a culture”, a term that in any conception usually refers to a variety of things. What exactly is then referred to with the term “culture”, what exactly is to be valued? Unless it is specified what exactly is meant, the practical meaning of the intrinsic value of a culture remains unclear. On the other hand, once the meaning of culture *is* specified, the idea of intrinsic value is difficult to reconcile with cultural transformation and internal heterogeneity. How can we attribute an intrinsic value to something that is subject to change and diverging evaluations?

To understand the dynamic and internal heterogeneity of cultures has even more consequences for the kind of multiculturalism that follows from the argument of intrinsic value. The “right to culture” is here usually translated into a plea for protection and preservation of cultures, or – as in Taylor – into a defense of a politics of *survivance*. As this by definition cannot mean to be anything else than to preserve a *specific* cultural heritage, it goes counter to the “nature” of culture (cf. Habermas 1995). And lastly, in political terms such protectionist multiculturalism may be qualified as outright conservative. As the earlier cited Hannerz remarks:

“To make sure that existing varieties of cultures are preserved as living entities, obviously we would have to transform ‘the right to one’s own culture’ into a duty to that culture. And that would no doubt be a great deal more controversial (Hannerz 1996: 58).”

Indeed, such a multiculturalism is not a reaction to nationalism, but a rather a variation of it.

Culture and autonomy

The argument that culture has an intrinsic value may be qualified as a conservative defense of multiculturalism. There are however also normative theorists who defend a multiculturalist theory based on the liberal principles of individual freedom and equality. The moral relevance of cultural identity is here not conceived of as intrinsic, but as instrumentally valuable.

This line of arguing is most thoroughly explored and developed by Will Kymlicka in his *Multicultural Citizenship*.¹⁴ Although in this work his primary subject is the position of national minorities, he also argues that immigrant ethnic minorities may rightfully claim special rights (Kymlicka himself speaks here of “polyethnic” rights). These rights are aimed at external protection of immigrant ethnic cultures against involuntary assimilation by the majority culture.

His central argument for this right is that one’s own culture constitutes, as he calls it, a context of choice:

“[...] freedom of choice is dependent on social practices, cultural meanings, and a shared language. Our capacity to form and revise a conception of the good is intimately tied to our membership in a societal culture, since the context of individual choice is the range of options passed down to us by our culture. Deciding how to lead our live is, in the first instance, a matter of exploring the possibilities made available by our culture. (Kymlicka, 1995:126, see also 83)”

This idea of culture as a context of choice implies that the protection of culture is consistent with, or even a prerequisite for liberal principles: by protecting someone’s culture we protect his individual freedom. For normative purposes, this argument seems quite consistent. But the idea that

14 See for very similar arguments Raz (1994) and Margalit & Halbertal (1994). In fact, Kymlicka’s *Multicultural citizenship* heavily relies on the central arguments about the value of culture developed by these authors.

culture is a context of choice remains a very rudimentary premise, and is indeed highly disputable.

First of all, his theory lacks a clear and consistent notion of culture. Indeed, although an understanding of culture seems pivotal for his argument, his usage is extremely slippery. At some places he states that he understands cultures as more or less synonymous to nation or people (18), while at others he speaks of cultures in terms of “societal cultures” that are “territorially concentrated”, by which culture seems to mean society (76). At yet other moments he speaks of cultural diversity within societies, whereby culture seems to refer to ethnic culture (11, 77). Sometimes culture is used synonymous to (often religious) worldviews or ideologies (152), while at other times he seems to equate culture with language groups, for example when he speaks of “Anglophone culture” (79).

More important however are his strongly culturalistic notion of culture, and his failure to distinguish culture from ethnicity. He often seems to believe that ethnic groups are culturally homogenous social categories. For example, we learn that immigrants “bring with them a shared vocabulary of tradition and convention” (77). He often speaks of ethnic groups as if they were strongly integrated communities that act collectively: ethnic groups “want” and “claim” things, and they “resist”. Sometimes even culture as such is personified: “It’s up to each culture to decide” (104). Since he insists that culture as a context of choice is limited to one’s own culture, Kymlicka seems to suggest that only within our own culture we can act meaningfully. Indeed, he approvingly cites Margalit and Raz (1990) who state that “familiarity with a culture determines the boundaries of the imaginable” (Kymlicka 1995: 89). Such a deterministic view may even be qualified as vulgar cultural relativism.

One could perhaps argue that Kymlicka’s usage of the notion of culture is indeed confusing and sociologically naive, but that this does not disqualify the general argument. However, his culturalistic perspective is more than an unfortunate choice of words in an attempt to formulate an otherwise sensible argument. On the contrary, his argument relies on culturalistic assumptions in a very substantial way. For once we realize that cultural

contents are inherently dynamic and variable, that ethnic groups do not share an uncontested and homogenous culture and that our individual identity is constructed by many social groups and cultural sources, then the idea of culture as a context of choice loses its impact. We may of course maintain that culture is a context of choice in the sense that people make choices in a cultural context, but this is trivial. Making significant choices people of course require “culture”, but not necessarily – let alone exclusively – their own. From a non-culturalistic perspective, the idea that “deciding how to lead our live is, in the first instance, a matter of exploring the possibilities made available by our culture” becomes untenable.

The rejection of culturalistic notions also has consequences for Kymlicka’s concrete conception of “multicultural citizenship”. For immigrant ethnic minorities, multicultural citizenship implies according to him that they are entitled to “polyethnic rights” aimed at preserving and enhancing their cultures. As examples of such rights Kymlicka mentions financial assistance for ethnic organizations, the arts, festivals, museums, publication of books and newspapers in immigrant languages and heritage languages classes (31). The problem is not that there are no sensible arguments for such measures, and even less so that they are *unjust*. The question is rather whether such measures according to Kymlicka should be considered as a “right” because they protect an individual’s “context of choice”. First, it is highly questionable that individual immigrants and their descendants are so much attached to their cultural background that without financial support for its reproduction we are limiting their choices. And it is even more questionable whether this holds for ethnic minorities in general (a fair requirement when arguing for a “right”). Second, Kymlicka’s plea for polyethnic rights seems to be based on the assumption that immigrant ethnic groups will forever continue to exist as ethnic groups. In practice, the impact and importance of the ethnic cultures and identities of immigrant groups is likely to decrease over time and certainly over generations, when often the distinction between majority and minority cultures at a group level can no longer be made. Is it reasonable to argue for protection of ethnic cultures of the second or third generation immigrants who are already highly integrated or perhaps even assimilated?

And thirdly, if one does not take culture to be a highly integrated, static and sharply defined set of elements shared by all “members” of the ethnic group, to talk of “protection of culture” seems useless, and concrete operationalization in terms of rights or policies impossible. For practical purposes not only a more specific and disaggregated terminology is needed for what actually *counts* as culture (beliefs, knowledge, artefacts, history, language?) as well as standards that indicate *what* culture may qualify for protection.

Cultural identity and self-esteem

A third argument we find in multiculturalist normative theories is the idea that recognition of (group) identity is a necessary precondition for one’s individual well-being. Or, to put it more precisely, that a positive recognition of the ethno-cultural identity of a group leads to a positive self-image of individuals within that group, and vice versa.

In a more philosophical vocabulary this argument has been put forward by Charles Taylor in his famous essay *The politics of recognition*:

“The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being (1992: 25).”

Taylor therefore concludes that “due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe to people. It is a vital human need” (26). Although from a completely different philosophical tradition, we find a similar argument in Iris Young’s *Justice and the politics of difference* (1990). Young draws our attention to a subtle process of suppression of ethnic minorities that she refers to as cultural imperialism. This process is characterized by three aspects: (1) in public life, minority groups are compelled to adjust to the norms and values of the dominant group’s culture; (2) these dominant norms and values bear the semblance of impartiality and universality, whereby only the minority cultures are considered as particular and deviant, which (3) leads to the suppression of one’s identity, loss of self-esteem and even to self-hatred

(164-165). Minorities are therefore confronted with ‘an irresolvable dilemma: to participate means to accept and adopt an identity one is not, and try to participate means to be reminded by oneself and others of the identity one is’ (165).

The argument of self-esteem or self-respect seems convincing by its strong moral appeal and by its simplicity and familiarity. Contrary to appeals to intrinsic value and culture as a context of choice, the argument of self-respect is often appealed to by not only philosophers, but also by politicians and policymakers. The then Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau for example referred to it when he proclaimed his official multiculturalism policy in 1971. He even elaborated the argument, adding to it that self-respect was of political importance: self-respect was a precondition for good citizenship:

“[...] national unity, if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on a confidence of one’s own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and assumptions (House of Commons 1971. Cit. in: Fleras & Elliot 1992: 281).”

Since the seventies, the argument of self-respect has therefore been considered as “*the* multicultural assumption” (Burnet 1995). Also, in the Dutch minorities policy the idea has played an important role (Lucassen & Köbben 1992: 117-118).

The argument also seems more convincing from a social scientific point of view. Many will be familiar with the stories of groups like the Burakumin, who as a result of centuries of discrimination and stigmatization are often said to hardly have considered themselves to be human. The classical study by Elias and Scotson (1976) on “established and outsiders” in London seems to demonstrate that a stigmatized group of outsiders internalizes a negative self-image, even in the absence of ethno-racial or cultural differences. It also suggest that in turn this perpetuates inequality. Notwithstanding all this, the argument is not indisputable. The negative relation between misrecognition and self-respect has often proved to be less unambiguous than suggested.

First, one often fails to make a distinction between the image a person has of the group to which he or she belongs (we-image) and the image a person has of him- or herself (self-image). Implicitly it is often assumed that the

first completely determines the second. But a person belongs to several groups and is also an individual. It turns out that in many situations, for example among young people, a person's self-image is only partly determined by the image that person has (or other have) of the ethnic or racial group (Verkuyten 1992; Vermeulen 1984). Other factors, such as body image, are often more important for one's self-image (Verkuyten 1992: 142). Second, it appears that individual members of ethnic groups not always suffer from a negative self-image or from a negative we-image. This discussion understandably played an important role in the case of the black Americans. But already in 1979 a survey study conducted by Porter & Washington led to the conclusion that the self-image of black Americans was in this respect not substantially different from that of white Americans. Recent research among black Americans also demonstrates that it is difficult to indicate to what extent the image of one's ethnic groups determines a person's global self-image (Verkuyten 1999). A study by Maykel Verkuyten conducted among ethnic minority youth in the Netherlands showed that there is a certain correlation between a negative image of one's ethnic group and a person's self-esteem, but it is certainly neither predominant nor unequivocal. For example, it appeared that in many cases one was indeed aware of a negative image of his ethnic group among the majority, but there were no clear indications that this negative image was internalized. Turkish youth even showed a higher self-esteem than Dutch youth (75-76).

5. Multiculturalism without culturalism

Where does all this lead to? In our introduction, we stated that it was certainly not our purpose to discard everything advocated by multiculturalist normative theorists. Neither do we wish to suggest that in actual multicultural societies there are no political controversies that deserve ethical reflection. We therefore argue for a continuation of ethical reflection and theory development on the questions of multicultural societies that are more sociological sensible, and free from the disputable and inadequate presuppositions we have criticized in the above. Such

“multiculturalism without culturalism” would have at least three consequences.

Disaggregating “culture”

A first consequence would be to recognize that “culture” is an impractical concept for normative theorizing. Both in form and content, it may refer to such a variety of phenomena that the practical impact of pleas for “a right to culture” or “recognition of culture” is either unclear or too encompassing and usually both. It seems more sensible to disaggregate the concept of culture and thereby the fact of intra-state cultural diversity into different dimensions. One could for example think of distinguishing such dimension as language, values, norms, religious beliefs and practices, the Arts, cultural artifacts and histories. Such a distinction has at least four advantages. First, it is more realistic in the sense that it does not presuppose an *a priori* integration of all these fields into a shared and distinguishable “culture”. A second advantage is that it may result in a more perspicuous debate on what is exactly at stake, and what exactly is referred to when one argues in favour of the recognition and rights of minority cultures. Thirdly, disaggregating the concept of culture will also show that not all dimensions lend themselves for a single ethical principle, argument or consideration. Some may even show unsuited for political philosophical reflection in the sense that they do not primarily manifest themselves at the level of state-citizen relations, or cannot be translated into rights and policies. And lastly, distinguishing these different dimensions makes clear that the issues at stake in the pleas for multiculturalism or multicultural citizenship are not always as new as is often suggested, and may not require reconsideration of established political philosophical categories and arguments, let alone developing and introducing new ones.

“Deculturalizing” the problematic of multicultural societies

This last point also allows us to “deculturalize” many immigrants claims that are now understood as constituting the problematic of multicultural societies. Disaggregating the concept of culture makes clear that in many cases, “culture” is not the problem, and therefore “multiculturalism” is not

the solution. When we look at many of the questions that contemporary political philosophers have raised as examples of the problematic of multicultural societies, the reader is immediately struck by the fact that in many cases the question seems to be about religion and religious diversity. Favorite questions are “should Muslims be allowed to wear headscarves in public institutions such as schools?”, or “can such practices as polygamy and female circumcision be tolerated?” In fact, in many cases these examples are not even related to (immigrant) ethnic groups. The literature is teeming with orthodox Jews, Old Order Amish, Mormons and Mennonites (e.g. Guttman 1993; Kymlicka 1995; Margalit & Halbertal 1994). In fact the debate is then about the meaning of secularism or the problem of value pluralism and the limits of toleration. It is unclear why such questions are presented as a “new” theme for political philosophy. Are these not the oldest (and maybe even the original) questions of political philosophy? It is just that some societies are now confronted with one or two new religions, which makes the subject topical again, but not new. It is then also unclear why such questions and their proposed answers are now framed in terms of culture and identity. Do we not already have the ethical and political vocabulary and arguments to understand and answer these questions? In other words, when we “deculturalize” the problematic of multicultural societies, we may realize that in a large number of cases answering actual questions and conflicts may not be a matter of arguing for the moral relevance of culture and identity and developing theories of “polyethnic rights” or “multicultural citizenship”, but simply a matter of universalizing already established human rights. In this respect, it may be instructive to reread John Stuart Mill’s famous *On liberty*. In this essay, Mill already in 1859 discussed the justness of imposing an obligatory Sunday rest on Jews, and the forbidding of the Mormon’s practice of polygamy (1989: 90-91), two examples that nowadays are frequently mentioned as paradigmatic questions of today’s multicultural societies. And while Mill simply framed and answered these questions in terms of the rights of individual freedom, in their recurrence as Islamic practices, these questions are suddenly reframed in terms of culture and cultural rights.

Mill's answers to these questions also reveal that we may even question whether multiculturalism's moral recognition of culture leads to more respect for minority cultures and more toleration for cultural differences. For Mill concluded that taking the rights to individual freedom of the Mormon's seriously implied that the practice of polygamy could not be prohibited by the state simply because the majority disapproves of it. For most multiculturalist normative theorists however, polygamy is the paradigmatic example of a practice where the "right to culture" stops, and the protection of basic human rights begins. So paradoxically, while an appeal to the moral importance of cultural identity is presented as a plea for more tolerance and respect for cultural diversity, calling practices and claims "cultural" also serves to draw to the limits of diversity more easily and strictly than if they were recognized as religious practices and claims, thereby falling under the category of religious rights and freedoms

Taking cultural transformation and internal heterogeneity seriously

A third consequence of a non-culturalistic multiculturalism is to take cultural transformation and internal heterogeneity of ethnic minority cultures seriously. This is an important fact in relation to arguments for financial or other forms of support for the expression or preservation of elements of minority cultures. A good example is the support for ethnic minority languages, for example through language classes in the public educational system. We would not contend that there are no good arguments at all for such language classes. But taking cultural change and internal heterogeneity seriously does mean that it does not make much sense to consider the maintenance of immigrant languages as a "right", much less so to be translated in an official legal right. Measures that are aimed at the support for elements of ethnic minority cultures should therefore better to be considered not as rights, but as possible and justifiable policy options. As such, they may be introduced when there is a clear demand, they can be altered as a result of changing circumstances, and they can be abolished when the target-group is integrated or when there is evidence that a majority shows no interest in preserving their ancestor's culture.

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Ana Devic

Nationalism, Regional Multiculturalism and Democracy in the Province of Vojvodina, Serbia's "Multiethnic Haven"

I. Main Questions

This paper addresses the issue of applicability of the theory and policies of liberal multiculturalism, as elaborated by its most prominent advocate, a Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka, in multiethnic spaces of the post-socialist Southeastern Europe. It focuses on a specific case of regionalism – as a form of identity and political movement – in the multiethnic northern Serbian province of Vojvodina, which has until today been spared of inter-ethnic violence that has characterized all other constitutive regions of the former socialist federative Yugoslavia. Based on a study of the development and activities of the Vojvodinian political parties and non-governmental organizations that have sought to wrest autonomy of the region vis-à-vis Serbia during both the reign of Slobodan Milosevic's regime and in its aftermath since 2000, the following questions are being asked: What is the reason that, despite the steady and rising dissatisfaction with the socio-economic standing of the Province among the ordinary people, and the sentiments that manifest regional and multiethnic (or inter-ethnic) identities, Vojvodinian autonomist parties have failed to mobilize significant political support? Why do they seem to be continuously losing the battle with the Belgrade-based parties for the proclaimed goals of the new constitutional and budgetary autonomy of the Province, which includes greater regulation, and support of its ethnic

minority and multiethnic institutions? Finally, and most significantly: Is the model of liberal multiculturalism, as a scheme of combating particularistic ethnic nationalisms and chauvinisms applicable in an environment where a passage from the socialist, one-party system to a democratic and pluralist organization of polity and society has been paralleled by conflicts and violence organized along ethnic lines and geared to enforce ethnic divisions. In other words, can the theory and policies prescribed by liberal multiculturalism (much studied and praised in the region) offer a model for construction of democratic polities in multiethnic spaces of the post-Communist East-Central Europe?

The following section of the paper will briefly outline the main argument of liberal multiculturalism and its uses for understanding the break-up and reconstruction of multi- and inter-ethnic experiences in the former Yugoslavia, as well as local prospects for democratization. It will also put in the question the applicability of liberal multiculturalism to the issues of cultural identity and political organization of immigrants in the states of the European Union.

Following the section on theoretical schemes, I will present a brief overview of the position of Vojvodina in the federal Yugoslavia and its social and cultural decline after the abolition of its constitutional autonomy in 1988. In the fourth part I will draw a map of political programs and activities of the local autonomist parties. The fifth section will focus on the non-governmental organizations, depicting their role in researching and framing the grievances, identities and solidarities of ordinary Vojvodinians in terms of evaluation of the prospects for local democratic development. Before the concluding section, I will outline some newest political developments that, in the aftermath of the 2000 elections, reveal the patterns of intense fights between the members of the Serbian coalition, where the goals of Vojvodinian autonomy and multiethnic identity may be reframed in terms of ethnic divisions and a scramble for sinecures.

Here I will demonstrate that the Vojvodinian autonomist elites' political strategy has consisted primarily of the deal-making with Serbian Belgrade-based parties, where the polity access has favored the choice of horse

trading and distribution of sinecures by both multiethnic and ethnic minority party leaderships. Simultaneously, they have been discouraged to organize large support in their locales. The goals of democracy, understood in this context as raising opportunities for broad political participation and advancement of regional ethnic and multiethnic practices, are thus being continuously preempted.

II. Theoretical considerations

Liberal multiculturalism, as a theory of ethnic and cultural identities and their links to political institutions, which has been developed most elaborately by the Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka,¹ postulates that ethnic identity is the main source of cultural self-identification and the principal form of political mobilization in democratic and multiethnic liberal states. Ethnic identity is the main basis for political solidarity (and, subsequently, the most tenacious political grievance) and must be therefore recognized, i.e. institutionalized on all levels of government: grouping along ethnic-cultural lines, thus, creates something akin to territorially concentrated interest groups. Curiously, although the concept of a benevolent democratic state that grants such privileges to ethnic groups is quite central to such multicultural society, the political foundations and development of such state are considered as given facts. In Kymlicka's works, we are never given an answer to the question, how the ethos of such multicultural state is instituted in historical practice, and brought to be able to equally politicize all cultural-ethnic identities on its territory. The connection between the links of ethnic minorities to that state is never compared to the links that ethnic majorities have to the state. In other words, this benevolent state appears to be the endowment of ethnic majority culture that recognizes "others" on its territory and elevates them

1 Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). See especially chapters on "Liberal Multiculturalism: An Emerging Consensus?" (Pp. 39-47); "From Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism to Liberal Nationalism" (pp. 203-220); and "Misunderstanding Nationalism" (pp. 242-253).

to the status equal or similar to its own. The neglect of the issues of nationalism as an ideology of state-building, and accompanying power relations is quite striking in Kymlicka's sparsely elaborated views on the modern history of the United States and other Western states, where he acknowledges that political elites had forged their democratic polities by imposing the "White Anglo-Saxon", "French", "German", or "British" culture on a variety of linguistically and culturally diverse populations. Kymlicka, however, does not suppose that the current state of liberal multiculturalism in these countries must be elaborated in relation to such foundational developments. The only explanation for their contemporary existence as liberal multicultural states he finds in the fact that ethnic minorities in these states had been able to press their cultural grievances to the point that they were recognized and institutionalized – due to the fact that democratic institutions have progressed over time to a desirable level. The circularity of the argument here is due to the lack of transparency of the role of state-building nationalism in modern Western societies. It becomes even more pervasive when we ask the question: what is the binding 'glue' of such multicultural states, if ethnic identities are to be considered as the main force of political mobilization. There, Kymlicka simply asserts that the population of a liberal democratic state (and we are terribly tempted to read this as "majority") somehow tolerates the fact that ethnic groups ("minorities") would have the right to secede and form 'their own' states if they wished to do so.

Still rare, albeit rigorous critics of Kymlicka, coming from the field of political sociology, have observed that the only significant effort that Kymlicka puts in providing alternatives to the dangers of majority, and especially minority nationalisms, is that he transports nationalism to sub-state levels, while discarding the potentials for primacy of non-ethnic identities in either everyday life or political mobilization. An elaborated criticism in this direction is presented in the work of Hans Vermeulen and Boris Slijper, who show the weaknesses of the philosophy of multiculturalism at its very premises, i.e. in its understanding of the

relationship between cultural and ethnic identity on the one hand, and national and political interests, on the other.² In their rigorous assessment of the nature of cultural diversity in globalized, especially Western societies, Vermeulen and Slijper point to the problems of a *culturalist* assessment of culture and ethnicity (to which multiculturalist philosophy belongs), which perceives both as “autonomous fields”, “independent from political or economic structures”. The authors show that such culturalist perceptions of culture and ethnicity had been prominent since the XIX century in the mainstream social science and humanities, and were tied to the ideology of nation-state formation. In this context, the idea of a culturally homogeneous society paralleled the interests of political and cultural elites who strove to forge a unifying set of cultural traits (ethnicity, language, religion) that had allegedly formed the basis of national-state allegiance. The idea of a pre- or meta-societal cultural homogeneity of a group of people who could be called citizens of one state assumed a special affinity with some crucial aspects of the democratic ideal, i.e. the given equality of human individuals.

Contemporary forms of liberal multiculturalism, as Vermeulen and Slijper argue, along with Dennis Wrong and Michael Billig,³ transport the same perceptions of the political relevance of cultural and ethnic homogeneity to sub-state levels. While arguing that ethnic majority nationalisms are wrong because they oppress minorities, liberal multiculturalists prescribe a variety of minority nationalisms that would serve as the best remedy against the majority nationalism, and would provide the primary basis for democratic organizing of citizens. In this way, they deny opportunities to citizens, especially those of ethnic minority backgrounds, to politically organize in pursuit of democracy around non-ethnic issues – that are available to members of ethnic majority only (or non-immigrant population)! Using

2 Hans Vermeulen and Boris Slijper, “Multiculturalism and Culturalism: A Social Scientific Critique of the Political Philosophy of Multiculturalism,” Paper presented at the Second EuroConference Democracy Beyond the Nation-State: Perspectives on a post-National Order, 5-7 October 2000, Athens.

3 Dennis H. Wrong, “Cultural Relativism as Ideology,” *Critical Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1997; Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).

examples from the immigrant societies of Western Europe, Vermeulen and Slijper show that immigrants, even those from countries geographically distant from Europe, show a great deal of internal cultural and social diversity, as well as an increasing propensity for cultural and political identification with their “new homes”. Subsequently, their ability and interest in engaging in democratic process may be limited more by concrete restrictive immigrant policies than by the alleged internal ethnic or religious homogeneity.

There are, thus, two main problems with liberal multiculturalism that bear relevance to both Western industrialized (immigrant) societies and multiethnic post-socialist “transitional” states. One is the identification of ethnic identity with all culture, or prioritization of ethnicity above all cultural traits, and the other is the assumption that such ethnicized culture is the primary basis for political organizing of ethnic minorities in the context of democratic societies. In the context of post-socialist states of East-Central and Southeastern Europe, these erroneous premises come into a state of dangerous affinity with the interests of nationalist elites who, during the past decade, strove to re-draw states boundaries, and justified their agendas with claims of providing political defense to ethnically homogeneous communities. In the context of the post-socialist societies, characterized with “democratic deficit”, identification of ethnicity with all cultural life and with the paramount political interest serves to deny both the reality of inter-ethnic lifestyles and prospects for alternative or oppositional political grouping. These problems have become more visible in the most recent attempt of the leading liberal multiculturalist to defend the model in a broader, non-Western, context.

In his most recently edited volume, to which he contributed two lengthy chapters, Will Kymlicka addresses the issue of applicability of liberal multiculturalism to the post-Communist states of East-Central Europe.⁴

4 Will Kymlicka and Magda Opalski, eds., *Can Liberal Pluralism be Exported? Western Political Theory and Ethnic Relations in Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See chapters “Western Political Theory and Ethnic Relations in Eastern Europe” (pp. 13-105), and “Reply and Conclusions” (pp. 347-413).

While he correctly postulates that one-party-led federations could only create pseudo-federalist systems where communist parties circumvent free politicization of ethnic identities, he does not consider that some other reasons apart, if not above, ethnic grievances could have formed the hopes for democratic transition in these countries. Assuming that the prevention of free ethnic homogenization around political institutions was the basis of mass discontent in the former communist states, Kymlicka contends that the main test for liberalization-democratization of this region remains their correct management of ethnic relations. Not surprisingly, the reasons for these states not to manage their ethnicities will remain only a matter of “learning”:

Most ECE states with minority nationalisms have the shell of liberal democracy, but *remain afraid* of the full and free exercise of democratic freedoms.⁵

While the passage from a pseudo-federalism to a “normal” one may be painful, the latter remains the best form of accommodating “minorities”, which are, just like in his treatment of ethnic politics in the West, defined as recipients of rights from a benevolent state (that belongs to the “majority”). In a single sentence, Kymlicka nevertheless mentions the possibility of non-territorial accommodation of ethnic rights, namely the conception of “cultural autonomy” formulated by Otto Bauer and other Austro-Marxists at the turn of the twentieth century, and referring to it as “an interesting supplement” to Western models of minority rights.⁶ While one could expect that here Kymlicka would question the assumption of the supposedly “given integration” or “neat fit” of territorially homogenized nations of the West, he merely acknowledges that in East-Central Europe “nations” (which are not analytically distinguished from “ethnicities” except when he speaks of immigrants) in many areas are more dispersed than in the West.

5 Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 369.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

The collapse of federal Yugoslavia through inter-ethnic wars is defined by Kymlicka as a struggle of disgruntled ethnicities against the “pseudo-federal” state, whose non-democratic polity only aggravated what could have been ‘normal’ ethnic claims for territorial autonomies. In his depiction of the political life in Bosnia-Herzegovina or Croatia we get no glimpse of the ways in which inter-ethnic relations worked on the ground, in everyday life, where supposedly discontents would have been simmering. Instead, by relying on an account of the Yugoslav wars by a Belgrade journalist, Kymlicka argues that Slobodan Milosevic, Franjo Tudjman and Alija Izetbegovic were illiberal (lacking democratic accountability) nationalists who sought to form unitary (Serb, Croat, Bosniak) states, thereby satisfying the grievances of their respective nations alone⁷. To argue that the main problem of Bosnian political elites (in three nationalist parties) in 1992 was their insensitivity to “minority claims”, not only displays the ignorance of the fact that in the pre-1992 Bosnia-Herzegovina, all three nationalities were constitutionally recognized as “titular nations”, but it also shows the lack of awareness of the densely interethnic cultures that characterized most of the former Yugoslavia (and especially Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Vojvodina), and a range of non-ethnic grievances that were captured by social scientists in all former Yugoslav republics prior to the outbreak of violence.⁸

And here we arrive at the point where liberal multiculturalism-nationalism starts making little sense: when trying to use the model for understanding the causality between the breakdown of former federal states through violence, and forms of inter-ethnic everyday life and main grievances of the population prior to the collapse of Communism and the first multi-party

7 Ibid., p. 92.

8 See Nikola Dugandzija, *Croatia Society on the Eve of Transition* (Zagreb: Institute for Social Research, 1993); Group of authors, *Jugoslavija na kriznoj prekretnici Yugoslavia at a Crisis Turning Point* (Beograd: Centar za politikoloska istrazivanja i javno mnjenje, 1991); Neven Andjelic: *The Evolution of the Civil Society in a pre – War Bosnia-Herzegovina*, in Stefano Bianchini and George Schöpflin, eds., *State Building in the Balkans. Dilemmas on the Eve of the 21st Century* (Ravenna: Longo, 1998).

elections. As the developments in the province of Vojvodina, where no inter-ethnic violence had taken place (and where, subsequently, one could argue, ethnic grievances were mostly suppressed and waiting to be “resolved”) show, the principal discontents of the population, both prior and after the end of the one-party rule, as well as after the fall of Milosevic’s regime, have been experienced as locale- and region-centered (not mono-ethnic) socio-economic problems, and concerns about the deterioration of inter-ethnic relations due to ethnonationalism. Here, the insistence on the application of liberal multiculturalism-nationalism in the form of prescribing ethnic institutions as the basis of a broader inclusion of the population in democratic processes is misleading. I will offer some additional Vojvodina-specific criticism and partial usefulness of the model in the last section of the paper.

III. Overview: Vojvodina, The Neglected “Multiethnic Haven”

In all of the former Yugoslavia, the initial staging of ethno-nationalist mobilization, which the faction of Slobodan Milosevic pursued in the form of a coup in the Serbian League of Communists in 1987, had a bandwagoning effect on the political machineries in the rest of the republics. This momentum was aggravated by the de-concentrated system of one-party oligarchic rule that, following the demise of the self-management socialist system, would be legitimized solely by the republics’ “titular nationalities”. Most importantly, the complete lack of access to polity, which had characterized the majority of ordinary people in the country for over forty years, had dragged them to lend support, if only passive and resting on insecurity and fears, to “their” nationalist parties. This was the process through which former Yugoslavs and civic persons became “vocational” Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, et al. Where few considered themselves before as “minorities” or “majorities”, now that was the only status they could strive for or fall victim to.

The most ethnically diverse constitutive region of the former socialist Yugoslavia,⁹ and the most economically developed part of the Later Serbian-Montenegrin federation, Vojvodina was the arena of the first violation of the constitutional autonomy of Serbia's provinces (Kosovo being the second) by Slobodan Milosevic's faction of the Serbian League of Communists in 1988. Since the first multiparty elections in 1990, the Province of Vojvodina has differed from Kosovo and the rest of ex-Yugoslav regions in staging its resistance to the Belgrade regime in the form of simultaneously seeking the restoration of its institutional support for linguistic and cultural diversity, and its political and economic self-rule. This programmatic stance is characteristic, with some variations in priorities, for both multiethnic and mono-ethnic minority political parties in Vojvodina: most local political actors have identified the goals of democratization and stability with some form of the Province's autonomy within Serbia and FR Yugoslavia.

Despite the fact that it was the first territory of the socialist federal Yugoslavia to have its constitutional autonomy abolished, as part of Slobodan Milosevic's advent to power in 1987-89, the efforts of regional political actors in the Province of Vojvodina, as mentioned previously, have been largely and until recently neglected by Western scholars and international power-brokers. One common-sense reason for this lack of interest may be the fact that it was spared from inter-ethnic violence despite

9 National Composition of Serbia and Vojvodina in 1991 in percentages

Serbia (total)		Serbia proper		Vojvodina	
Serbs	66	Serbs	87	Serbs	57
Albanians	17	Muslims	2.5	Hungarians	17
Yugoslavs	3	Yugoslavs	2.5	Yugoslavs	8.4
Muslims	2	Albanians	N/a	Croats	4.8
Croats	1	Montenegrins	1.4	Slovaks	3.2
Montenegrins	1			Montenegrins	2.2
Macedonians	0.4			Rumanians	1.9
Slovenes	0.1			Ruthenians	0.9
				Macedonians	0.8
Other	8	Other	10	Other	3.5

Source: Yugoslav Survey, No. 1 (1992).

its multiethnicity, and, thus, belonged to a deviant case, which would be left to study for more peaceful times. The unfortunate outcome of such “boxed” status of Vojvodina was that it was considered as a “safe haven”, a “model of multiethnic coexistence”, but – because it was still part of the “troubled region” – it was not included, just like most of the successor states of former Yugoslavia, in the studies of post-socialist democratization. More concerted international efforts to assist the regional parties and non-governmental organizations in Vojvodina became visible only in late 1998, prompted by the planning of the military intervention in Kosovo, and the subsequent greater interest of international actors in pooling together the anti-Milosevic parties and anti-nationalist civic groups.

Until the fall of Milosevic’s regime in October 2000, Vojvodinian regionalist and anti-nationalist actors (especially non-governmental organizations which grew out of the anti-war protests of 1991-1992) had reasons to believe that the greater international interest and assistance to local initiatives would also continue beyond the goal of dethroning Milosevic, and extend to supporting programs of the restoration of autonomy to the Province’s assembly, economy and multiethnic cultural institutions. Hopes grew high, especially after the inauguration of the Pact for Stability in Southeastern Europe in 1999, a European Union initiative that supported regional projects ranging from infrastructure rebuilding to laws on minority rights. Montenegro, as a democracy-bound breakaway from the rump Yugoslavia, was admitted to the Pact’s program in a special capacity. Many experts and non-governmental activists in Vojvodina believed at the time that Vojvodina could join, too, as a province with special regional needs. Much of the efforts vested by Vojvodinian experts in preparing project proposals for joining the Stability Pact had to be forgotten after October 2000, since, as it was actually clear from the Pact’s rules, only individual states could become its partners.

A structured analysis of political processes in Vojvodina as part of the analysis of the rise and (future) fall of ethno-nationalism in Serbia and FR Yugoslavia is still in its naissance. The following sections will chart a map of partisan and civic actors that should inform such analysis.

IV. *Regionalist Political Parties*

The setback in the economic, political and cultural autonomy of the Province of Vojvodina, manifested in the abolition of its previously independent judicial, legislative and executive bodies in 1988-90, and coinciding with the introduction of a multi-party system, gave impetus to the emergence of several 'autonomist' Vojvodinian parties. They drew their leadership from the vast numbers of Vojvodinian political and cultural elites that were either directly dismissed or marginalized in the aftermath of the 1988 putsch by Slobodan Milosevic's faction in the Serbian League of Communists.

In the programs of all three largest Vojvodina-based parties – the Reformist Democratic Party of Vojvodina, the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina, and the Alliance of Vojvodinian Hungarians – the period from 1968 to 1988, during which Vojvodina had enjoyed a status nearly identical to that of federal republics is distinguished from the subsequent period (which largely coincides with the introduction of a multi-party system) in which most of Vojvodina's prerogatives of autonomy were abolished. In the programs of all three parties, this demarcation line plays a point of departure for the elaboration of negative consequences of the political centralization in Serbia under Milosevic. While the main theme of the party program of the Alliance of Vojvodinian Hungarians, the strongest ethnic party not only in Vojvodina but in Serbia as well, is cultural and administrative autonomy of Hungarians in Vojvodina,¹⁰ the Alliance shares

10 The program of the Alliance of Vojvodinian Hungarians has envisaged a combination of personal (cultural) and territorial autonomy. The Alliance's leadership has customarily switched between the two options during their electoral campaigns, and especially in their dealings with the strongest Serbian parties. Personal autonomy would extend to all Vojvodinian Hungarians, regardless of party allegiance or residence, who would be organized in National Councils in charge of the restoration and maintenance of Hungarian cultural and media institutions. On occasions, territorial autonomy has been demanded for northern Backa, a region in Vojvodina bordering Hungary, in which Hungarians form majority in eight municipalities. The Democratic Community of Vojvodinian Hungarians, a party that captured the majority of Hungarian votes in Vojvodina in 1990-1992, but became marginalized in the following period, has initially elaborated this multi-layered model of autonomy.

its concern with what is commonly defined as economic exploitation of Vojvodina (by the Belgrade-based institutions) with the Reformist Party and the League of Social Democrats. All party programs point to the relative wealth of the Province in comparison to Serbia proper, which stands in dramatic contrast to the rampant unemployment and growing poverty. The following effects of the 1988-1990 abolition of the governmental and legislative autonomy of Vojvodina are emphasized in the autonomist parties' programs: the loss of control over agricultural surpluses (the main source of the Province's income); the loss of managerial autonomy over all industrial complexes in Vojvodina (such as two major oil refineries in Novi Sad and Pancevo and the system of field irrigation); the elimination of Vojvodinian autonomous budgetary institutions and the office of tax revenues; and the closing of the Novi Sad Radio-Television station, which became a local branch of Radio-TV Serbia. The abolition of the formerly autonomous Vojvodinian media centers, in combination with the elimination of the previously rich budgetary donations to multilingual educational curricula (until 1990, they were allocated directly from the Vojvodinian budget) have significantly contributed to the decline of the Province's multiethnic and inter-ethnic cultural and academic scene. Additional foci of concern of the Vojvodinian political parties include the relationship between the economic and cultural weakening of Vojvodina and dramatic migration trends, which affected the Province after the beginning of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1991-1992: since Vojvodina was targeted by the military draft to a much greater extent than other areas in Serbia, large numbers of young Vojvodinian Hungarians and draft-dodging Serbs had left the country (from the total of close to 90,000 draft dodgers who left the Province since 1991, over 50,000 were Vojvodinian Hungarians). Simultaneously, close to 300,000 Serb refugees and displaced persons from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina had settled in Vojvodina between 1991 and 1997.

Territorial autonomy would leave close to two fifths of Vojvodinian Hungarians without the same rights to education and information in their mother tongue that their co-ethnics in the north of Vojvodina would enjoy.

In view of these facts documenting economic decline and cultural changes in Vojvodina, and their apparently direct link to the abolition of the Province's prerogatives of autonomy, it seems striking that Vojvodinian autonomist parties attracted a minuscule following between 1990 and 1997. During this period, the Socialist Party of Serbia and Serb Radical Party could count on the average support of fifty per cent of those who voted in Vojvodina. The following data depict electoral preferences of Vojvodinians during the republican elections in 1992 and 1997.

1992 Elections for Deputies in the Serbian Parliament (Results for Vojvodina)¹¹

Political party	Percentage of votes	Percentage of Vojvodinian mandates
Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS)	23	30
Serb Radical Party	23	30
Democratic Community of Vojvodinian Hungarians	11	16
Coalition DEPOS (Belgrade-based anti-Milosevic parties)	15	19
Coalition of Democratic Party and Reformist Democratic Party of Vojvodina	5.7	3.6

1997 Elections for Deputies in the Serbian Parliament (Results for Vojvodina)¹²

Political party	Percentage of votes	Percentage of Vojvodinian mandates
Serb Radical Party	29	38
Coalition of SPS, Yugoslav Party of Left, and New Democracy	28	40
Serb Renewal Party	9.7	7
Alliance of Vojvodinian Hungarians	5	7
Coalition of Vojvodinian autonomist parties	11	7

It would be tempting to interpret these electoral results as a manifestation

11 Seventy nine per cent of the population voted. From Miroslav Samardzic, *Polozaj manjina u Vojvodini* The Status of Minorities in Vojvodina (Belgrade: Centar za antiratnu akciju, 1998, p. 134).

12 Sixty two per cent of the population voted. Ibid., p.138.

of the Vojvodinian Serbs' preferences for ethnonationalist agendas: in this case, the after-shocks of the expulsion of Croatian Serbs, who have flocked to the Province in the aftermath of the 1995 Croatian Army re-occupation of the territories which Serbs had carved in the newly independent state of Croatia in 1991-1992. However, this explanation would miss the facts of the increasing voters' abstinence, the continuous rivalries between the party leaders of the two main multiethnic autonomist parties at the expense of the choice of building stable coalitions, the periodic granting of parliamentary sinecures to the leaders of the main Hungarian party by the regime, and an exemplary organization of electoral campaigns of the ultra-nationalist Radical Party, during which it successfully played down its paramilitary activities in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and voiced its dedication to protecting Vojvodina against the potential spread of violence from the neighboring regions.

It seemed that the situation had changed dramatically during the 2000 presidential and local elections, when close to sixty per cent of the Vojvodinian electorate voted for the coalition Democratic Opposition of Serbia (which both the Hungarian Alliance and the two multiethnic Vojvodina parties joined) and its candidate Vojislav Kostunica, while the percentage of those who went to the polls grew from sixty per cent in 1997 to over seventy in 2000. However, it is safe to argue that, similar to the situation in Serbia proper, these votes were cast primarily against Slobodan Milosevic's party and its allies, and it is less likely that they expressed allegiance to any of the Vojvodinian parties in particular (with the partial exception of the Hungarian Alliance, which ran alone in the local elections in several towns in the Northern Backa). In reality, over almost a decade the lack of significant following has been a characteristic of both multiethnic and Hungarian political parties. Voters' abstinence has been striking and growing over the past decade among the Hungarian and Serb populations (the two largest nationalities) alike. In contrast to Kosovo Albanians, who reacted to the oppression by the Serbian regime with an increased homogenization around one ethnic party, the Vojvodinian Hungarian vote was fractured as the initially strong Democratic Alliance of Vojvodinian Hungarians split in 1993 into two parties, and then was split

again in 1996.¹³ The splits, which until now produced six Hungarian parties, were accompanied by the increase in Hungarian voters' abstinence.

One would hope that the overwhelming electoral defeat of the Socialist Party and Serbian Radical Party in the 2000 elections, in combination with awareness of the growing autonomist sentiment of the Vojvodinian hitherto passive electorate, would lead Vojvodinian autonomist parties to realize that the main reason for their fledgling popularity is not to be sought in their potential constituencies' infatuation with ethnonationalist ideology. In other words, it could be expected that in the future Vojvodinian parties would face their unsuccessful mobilizational capacity, and would address the fact that their potential voters have been unable to relate their everyday-life grievances to their local parties' programs and behavior – fearful of building coalitions, and prone to a culturalist idealizing of the socialist past of the Province.

The first steps that the Vojvodinian autonomist parties took in the aftermath of the 2000 elections indicated some degree of readiness to stick to their joint proposal for the re-instatement of the Vojvodinian autonomy. The Platform on the Constitutional Position of Vojvodina, which was passed in the Vojvodinian Assembly in April 2001 and submitted to the Serbian assembly (a somewhat ironic move, as the prerogatives of the Vojvodinian assembly vis-à-vis Serbia in the meantime were not reinstated even to the level they had in 1989-1990),¹⁴ proposed the following consecutive steps in reinstating the autonomy of the Province: 1) The abolition of over 100 laws that were passed in the Serbian Parliament between 1992 and 1996, which destroyed even those remnants of the Province's autonomy that were retained in the 1990 Constitution of Serbia; 2) Pressuring political parties in the Serbian and federal parliaments to start re-writing the Constitution of FR Yugoslavia with the emphasis on an asymmetric decentralization of

13 See Zoran Lutovac, "Ucesce manjina u politickom zivotu SRJ" Participation of Minorities in the Political Life of the FR Yugoslavia, *Republika*, Nos. 167-168, July 1997.

political and economic control.¹⁵ The Vojvodinian political parties envisioned that, following a successful implementation of these two sets of changes, the newly empowered legislative and executive bodies of the Province would exert further pressure on the Serbian and federal parliaments toward the institutionalization of a ‘special autonomy’ status of Vojvodina.

Further details pertaining to dynamics of the positioning of Vojvodinian actors vis-à-vis the Belgrade-based parties will be presented in the section depicting the most recent developments in the Province. Let us now turn to Vojvodinian non-governmental organizations, i.e. the arena of civil society activities.

V. *Non-Governmental Organizations: Studies in Regional Discontent, Identities and Solidarities*

As was previously noted, the Vojvodinian non-governmental scene was given a boost in late 1998, in the form of interest and financial assistance of international donors pursuing the goal of deposing Slobodan Milosevic, where one of the standard means was the ‘revival of civil society.’ The multiethnic map of Vojvodina, as well as its apparent resistance to inter-ethnic violence was now perceived as a suitable ground for cultivating agents of the prospective democratic change. A number of local intellectuals’ forums, composed of the cultural and political elites dismissed during Milosevic’s coup in 1988, newer recruits from the numerous pool of draft-dodgers of the 1991-1992 war with Croatia, and former anti-war activists, many of whom grew disillusioned with the Vojvodinian autonomist parties, assembled in the leadership and managers of the new NGOs, dedicated to Vojvodinian autonomy (or its incorporation

14 All Vojvodinian political parties and other Belgrade-based parties of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia, with the notable exception of Vojislav Kostunica’s Democratic Party of Serbia, voted for the Platform.

15 Milena Putnik, “Srbiji predstoje ustavne promene: Obnavljanje Vojvodine“ Serbia is facing Constitutional Reforms: The Rebirth of Vojvodina, *AIM*, April 26, 2001.

in the broader currents of Euro-regionalization), and the restoration of the local minority and multiethnic cultural scene. In the past four years, their major contributions to the growth of the Vojvodinian civil space have been threefold: 1) carrying out and publicizing projects on the local population's grievances and identities; 2) monitoring and politicizing the problems of ethnic minorities; and 3) organizing local legal and political scientists as expert advisors to Vojvodinian and Serbian MPs whose agendas include the constitutional reform of FR Yugoslavia and autonomy for Vojvodina. Activities of three Vojvodinian NGOs, which I will present below, serve as examples of these three directions of improvement and politicization of the local civil society scene.

The Novi Sad-based Center for Regionalism, founded in 1998 with a grant from the US Agency for Development (USAID), is a think-tank whose initial task was to assist Vojvodinian anti-regime economists, social scientists and lawyers in their efforts to establish links with various regional associations in Southeastern Europe. Until the demise of Slobodan Milosevic's regime in 2000, the Center had organized several workshops on the prospects of economic and diplomatic cooperation between the Dayton Triangle states (which include FR Yugoslavia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina). In the course of 1999 and 2000, the Center collaborated with several Croatian and Bosnian NGOs in preparing joint proposals for introducing dual citizenship laws and monitoring the safe return of refugees across the borders of the formerly warring states.

Since 1999, the Center for Regionalism has engaged in commissioning proposals for constitutional reform of the FR Yugoslavia with an emphasis on the new autonomy for Vojvodina. The result was a study titled "Constitutional and Legal Framework for Decentralization of Serbia and Autonomy of Vojvodina", which was subsequently submitted to functionaries of the Vojvodinian autonomist parties as an aid in their drafting of the proposal for the reinstatement of Vojvodina's political and economic liberties. The latter proposal was submitted to the Serbian

parliament in April 2001. The Center for Regionalism subsequently sent an abbreviated version of the study directly to the Republican Parliament.¹⁶

In the aftermath of the 2000 elections, the Center for Regionalism has developed a more aggressive publicity scheme for popularizing the project, which included media broadcasts of the experts' meetings in all urban areas in Vojvodina. The 'Constitutional and Legal Framework for the Decentralization of Serbia' proposes that the state should be organized as a "regionalized state community", where each region would have the right to its own constitution, parliament and executive organs. An alternative proposal emphasizes that the future re-constitution of Serbia and FR Yugoslavia must occur in response to bottom-up pressures coming from individual regions themselves. It argues that Vojvodinian claims to autonomy must be given priority attention by the Serbian parliament and the 2000 winning coalition, since not all Serbian regions may be interested in equal degrees and forms of autonomy. It also states that in the case that the Serbian Parliament would reject the general plan for regionalization (or, if other regions in Serbia would not support this initiative), Vojvodina must be guaranteed a special status of 'an autonomous European region,' with its own constitution, parliament, local self-rule, and a possibility of creating sub-regions within Vojvodina, which would reflect the special economic and ethno-cultural configuration of the Province.

These endeavors of the Center for Regionalism to push for a constitutional reform in favor of the Vojvodinian autonomy present an action on the part of local NGOs to complement and correct the Vojvodinian parties' programs for autonomy with a combination of expert knowledge on the detrimental effects of the centralized rule in Serbia. They have also contributed, through their publicity agenda, to the popularization of the proposals for Vojvodinian autonomy in various public settings.

16 The digested version of the study was published in the Belgrade daily *Danas*, which became the mouthpiece of the Serbian oppositional scene prior to their October 2000 victory. See "Ustavno-pravni okvir decentralizacije Srbije i autonomije Vojvodine" The Constitutional-Legal Framework of the Decentralization of Serbia and Autonomy of Vojvodina, *Danas*, March 25-26, 27, and 30, 2000.

The Center For Multiculturalism (CMC), which was founded in Novi Sad in 1998 with a grant of the Open Society Fund, is the most literary and academic NGO in Vojvodina. It focuses on the exploration of multiculturalism, mostly understood as monitoring and promotion of issues of minority politics. CMC has organized summer courses in Hungarian, Rumanian and Slovak languages in several Vojvodinian cities, with the goal of exposing majority linguistic groups (Serbs and Croats) to the practices of multilingualism, which had been dying out in Vojvodina since the end of WWII. Special attention is being paid to problems of the local ethnic communities, particularly those aspects of their life that were made invisible by both the repressive language policies and discrimination in the appointment of local officials during Milosevic's era. In cooperation with the policy-oriented experts of the Center for Regionalism, CMC has organized several workshops on the comparative problems of minority politics in the post-Communist region. CMC publishes two periodicals: a newsletter *Informator*, which focuses on institutional problems of the Vojvodinian minorities and records all local events pertaining to minority organization; and *Habitus*, an academic journal (published also on the Internet in six Vojvodinian languages plus English and German), which publishes articles and discussions on liberal multiculturalism and its possible uses in the post-communist countries. *Habitus* intends to encourage cooperation between academics and practitioners from Southeastern Europe interested in the ideas and policies of multiculturalism.

It should be noted that several authors from East-Central Europe who contributed to the earlier cited volume *Can Liberal Pluralism be Exported? Western Political Theory and Ethnic Relations in Eastern Europe* had previously published their essays in *Habitus*. Among them is Tibor Varady, a Vojvodinian law professor and a minister of justice in the short-lived 1992 cabinet of the Serbian prime minister Milan Panic. Varady argues that the institutional arrangement of ethnic pluralism in the former socialist Yugoslavia bore many similarities to the situation in Canada, Switzerland and Finland. In contrast to the theses about the suppression of ethnic identities during socialism, Varady shows that ethno-pluralism had not only

been institutionalized and supported by the League of Communists, but also had its parallels and relative autonomy in the culture of everyday life, which became increasingly vulnerable once the socialist system of collective security had started falling apart. Varady suggests that Will Kymlicka's normative proposals for the management of ethnic relations could be adopted in Vojvodina to the extent that educational and cultural institutions in minority languages, as well as affirmative action in the appointment of minority MPs, had suffered severe setbacks after 1988: the remedying of these injustices, as part of the re-autonomization of Vojvodina, could be a contribution to the democratization of the Province in terms of restoring inter-ethnic trust. A much less convincing proposal for management of ethnic relations is then set in the context of the post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Varady does not problematize the violent foundations of the two ethnically defined and homogenized 'entities' as a framework for ethno-cultural justice.¹⁷

Activities of the umbrella non-governmental organization Humanitarian Society Panonija contribute to the revival of sociological and anthropological studies of the Vojvodinian regional and inter-ethnic identities, and on their popularization in the local media and international policy forums. Its most impressive research project, *Regional Identity and Local Responsibility: A Study of the Vojvodinian Public Opinion*, was conducted in seven Vojvodinian cities in the aftermath of the 2000 elections by a team of social scientists from the University of Novi Sad. It consisted of a survey on the forms of cultural identification among ordinary people in Vojvodina, and their expectations from the anticipated "transition to democracy". The questionnaire of the survey reflects the researchers' intention to define a regional Vojvodinian identity against the background of the notion of local responsibility, i.e. "the willingness of residents of Vojvodina to contribute to prosperity of their local community".

17 Tibor Varady, "O sansama za etnokulturnu pravdu u Centralnoj i Istocnoj Evropi - sa osvrtom na Dejtonski sporazum" On the Chances of Ethno-Cultural Justice in Central and Eastern Europe – with Referencs to the Dayton Agreement, *Habitus*, No. 0, 2000.

According to the project's findings, close to fifty per cent of the respondents identified with their local community (defined as one's city of residence, and the Province) in comparison to only ten per cent who identified with Serbia, over sixty per cent wished for autonomy of Vojvodinian economic and cultural institutions (in contrast to twenty per cent of those who opted for the status quo), fifty per cent defined their vision of "democratic changes" as "economic improvement", while the same percentage believed that their well-being would be improved, if the Province were to join regional international associations.

The breakdown of answers to the question about the preferred political status of Vojvodina shows that, with the exception of Montenegrins, more than fifty per cent of the respondents within each ethnic group support improvements in Vojvodinian economic and cultural autonomy.

What Status Should Vojvodina Have?¹⁸

	Existing status	Economic and cultural autonomy within the Republic of Serbia	Republic within the Yugoslavia	FR Independent state	Total
Serbs	77 23.4%	202 61.4%	37 11.2%	13 4.0%	329 100%
Montenegrins	19 65.5%	6 20.7%	4 13.8%		29 100%
Croats	10 24.4%	25 61.0%	5 12.2%	1 2.4%	41 100%
Hungarians	12 23.5%	24 47.1%	11 21.6%	4 7.8%	51 100%
Others	23 35.4%	27 41.5%	11 16.9%	4 6.2	65 100%

This study shows only a minor difference between the two largest ethnic groups, Serbs and Hungarians, regarding the issue of Vojvodinian autonomy and identification with one's region and place of residence. The

18 Zsolt Lazar and Dusan Marinkovic, GEOTAKT: Regionalni identitet i lokalna odgovornost Regionalno povezivanje Geotakt: Regional Identity and Local Responsibility (Novi Sad: Dobrotvorno drustvo Panonija, 2000).

authors suggest that a new cultural policy in Vojvodina, as part of the reinstatement of its political and economic autonomy, must reflect its residents' specific forms and hierarchy of identities, which they characterize as "interculturalism". They define "multiculturalism" as a form of cultural policy that refers to a society in which several cultures coexist side by side, while "interculturalism" of the Vojvodinian type depicts a society characterized by a culture of "dialogical interaction".¹⁹

Another study of interethnic relations in Vojvodina, commissioned by the Serbian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, which includes ethnic Serb refugees from Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo who settled in the province between 1991 and 1999 (unofficial figures show their numbers to be around 300,000) shows a more comprehensive and critical picture of the newly emerging "ethnic mind-set". The most interesting finding of the study is that inter-personal interethnic relations between the province's ethnicities are still at similar levels to those detected before 1991. But it also points to a newly emerging form of prejudices against groups, which are connected to the previously unregistered perceptions of ethnic competition. The latter are attributed to the sharp economic decline in the 1990s (where unemployment is not likely to improve after the 2000 regime change), and to the politics of ethnic homogenization, manifested in the past regime's practices of giving concessions-sinecures to leaders of the strongest ethnic parties. I have in mind here primarily the Alliance of Vojvodinian Hungarians, in relation to which the same practice continues in the dealings between the currently ruling coalition and ethnic Vojvodinian leaders.

The result of these ethnic politics is, on the one hand, the clustering of ethnic aspirants to party positions in bigger cities and a complete lack of access to political decision-making in rural areas (for example, over two fifths of ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina live in non-Hungarian majority areas), and among less numerous minorities, such as Slovaks and

19 Zsolt Lazar and Dusan Marinkovic, "Od multikulturene prema interkulturnoj Vojvodini" From Multicultural to Intercultural Vojvodina, unpublished manuscript.

Rumanians. Not surprisingly, the latter negatively respond to questions about improvements in collective rights; lacking partisan representation and related access to ministerial sinecures and foreign-funded NGO jobs, they seek recognition of their individual human rights, and identify to a greater extent than Serbs and Hungarians (largest groups) with Vojvodina as their home and its autonomist multiethnic parties.

The study explains the current post-Milosevic wave of ethnic homogenization in Vojvodina, spearheaded by ethnic party leaderships and by the pre-existing patterns of polity access. It also observes that the current “democratization” trends aggravate these patterns due to a greater allowance and encouragement for competition between ethnic parties, and prospects for opening a range of new posts in the re-constituted governmental and parliamentary bodies of the Province. The price for such trends is paid by members of smaller ethnic groups, a large number of ethnics even of the largest minority nationality who live in non-homogeneous areas, and refugees who are perceived as competition by all ethnicities of Vojvodina, including the Serbs. The results of this comprehensive study show new forms of ethnic nationalism-cum-competition, which distorts the reality of the diminishing resources of the Province, as well as its interculturalism, but correctly depicts the rise of a new class of aspirants to ethnic “resource pools” and the competition between minority nationalities’ elites. The rise of homogenization and competition that are typically detected in Western industrialized countries, is here often accompanied by claims for the introduction of liberal multiculturalism and territorial autonomy for ethnic populations (typical for post-Communist states with a previous layout of ethno-federalism): they can hardly disguise the scramble for material and status gains in a space of Serbia, which arrived to the club of ‘transition societies’ with a decade-long delay. This study also predicts that a pattern of ethnic competition, if pursued between the Vojvodinian ethnic minority leadership and Belgrade

based parties would further weaken the pro-autonomy and civil options for the Province.²⁰

As stated before, the greatest contribution of the Vojvodinian NGOs lies in their dedication to public opinion surveys and project aiming at the legitimation of the province's regional and multiethnic ethos, both of which have been neglected by the autonomist multiethnic parties. It should be noted that Vojvodinian NGOs, despite their frequent lending of expert assistance to the local parties, have kept their critical stance toward the autonomist and minority partisan politics, especially toward their long-time neglect of the actual grievances of the population and their inability to forge lasting coalitions with each other. We should also not forget that until 2000 NGOs did not have to compete with Serbian ministries and agencies for foreign funding: nowadays, funders (especially those from the EU states) prefer governmental organizations as recipients of project funds over civil society groups, which are inadvertently considered as "having done their job". This tendency may have negative implications for civic and political mobilization of ordinary people since it reduces venues for democratic participation and activism to party politics alone.

VI. Newest Developments after 2000: Horse Trading, Sinecure Exchange

In January 2002, the Serbian Assembly has adopted (with a one-vote majority) the so-called "Omnibus Law" (subsequently operationalized in June of this year), a package of regulations, which should return certain financial and executive prerogatives to the Vojvodinian Assembly. This law is conceived as an interim measure aimed at reinstating some of the prerogatives of the Vojvodinian autonomy: it corrects some violations of the 1990 Constitution of Serbia, which was actually passed as part of Slobodan Milosevic's program of the abolition of Vojvodina's autonomy

20 Vladimir Ilic, "Minorities and Refugees in a Tangle of Nationalistic Radicalization", *Helsinki Committee in Serbia Files*, <http://www.Helsinki.org.yu/hcs/HCSfiles8complete.htm>

(!). This law returns to the Provincial Assembly the rights to govern its health and pension funds, and establish cultural and media institutions relevant for the Province's multiethnic scene. What is more significant is that the passing of the "Omnibus Law" coincided with the initiative for changes in the Serbian republican Privatization Law, which should now allow for fifty per cent of income from the sales of state enterprises in the territory of Vojvodina to be retained by the Province (instead of five per cent, which was the case before). It also coincided with the distribution of a dozen of newly freed mandates in the Serbian Assembly to functionaries of the two largest Vojvodinian autonomist parties (the League of Social Democrats, and the Vojvodinian Reformists) – the mandates that the Democratic Party of the Serbian prime minister Zoran Djindjic had recently taken away from the party of his arch-rival Vojislav Kostunica, the current president of FR Yugoslavia (under the pretext of the latter's MPs absenteeism).

The Serbian prime minister did not have to pay for the new liberties of Vojvodina too dearly. Omnibus Law's provisions for health and pension funds, while reduced in the course of the parliamentary squabbles from 12 to 9 billion dinars (200 to 150 million US dollars), are in fact equal to the sum that anyway must be spent by the Republic for state expenditures of the Province. The privatization sales income (from the sale of Vojvodinian cement factories, oil refinery and five sugar plants) would equal to the amount of funds, which the republican budget must allocate for the reconstruction of industrial infrastructure and restructuring in Vojvodina. It should be noted that almost all current income from the privatization of state enterprises comes from the sale of Vojvodinian plants, since 95 per cent of foreign investors are interested only in the property located north of the Sava and Danube rivers.

These newest seemingly positive developments did not affirm what the autonomist Vojvodinian parties had considered for a long as their main goal, i.e. a fundamental change in the constitutional position of Vojvodina. When an expert commission, staffed by intellectuals from the main Vojvodinian civic NGOs, recently submitted to the Vojvodinian MPs (and subsequently to the Serbian Assembly) the "Basic Law on Vojvodinian

Autonomy”, the Assembly promptly deleted the principal opening clauses containing the definition of the Province’s autonomy.²¹

In March of 2002, the new federal Law on National Minorities was adopted, which was praised in the media by the main Hungarian parties’ leaders as “the most advanced law on minorities in Europe”. In the words of Tamas Korhec, the Vojvodinian Minister for Minority Issues and a leading member of the Alliance of Vojvodinian Hungarians, the Law is revolutionary, ‘because it recognizes the right to self-rule in the issues of language and culture, and because it was drafted with the expert advice of the Council of Europe and the Organization for European Security and Cooperation.’²² The Law is, indeed, innovative in its provisions that street names and signs in the ethnically mixed areas, along with personal documents of ethnic minority members, would be written in the scripts and orthographies of corresponding languages. In reality, the Law on Minorities did not change the crucial provision for schooling in one’s mother tongue in elementary and high schools: it still postulates that the percentage of minority students must be 15 per cent or more. How devastating for the preservation of Vojvodina’s ethnic groups’ tongues and cultures this law is, can be seen when one remembers that whole villages in Vojvodina have become de-populated in the last fifty years because of the “flight to cities”, which leaves areas with a high concentration of minority members populated by old people.²³ The much lauded Law on Minorities seems to be much more applicable to countries like Canada, where ethnic groups had settled and concentrated for a long time on separate territories. Even before the most recent changes in the demographic distribution, ethnically dispersed populations had been a historical characteristic of the Province of Vojvodina, with the exception of six predominantly Hungarian municipalities in the region of Northern Backa bordering Hungary.

21 Dimitrije Boarov, “Ustavnoj povelji ususet” Waiting for the Constitutional Charter, Helsinki Reports, June 2002, <http://www.helsinki.org.yuhcs/HCS2002Jun12.htm>

22 <http://www.vmsz.org.yu/sh/onama/cikk.php?id=32>

23 In addition, approximately 50,000 younger Vojvodinian Hungarians have left the Province in the last 10 years, avoiding the military draft: at least half of them have subsequently found jobs and settled in Hungary.

Deplorably, what seems to matter most with regard to the new law on minorities is the fact that the largest Hungarian party can feel victorious since it satisfies parts of its demands for territorial autonomy. In other words, with the high 15 per cent in the population census line, less than three fifths of Vojvodinian Hungarians could hope to receive education in their mother tongue, while over two fifths of territorially dispersed Hungarians would be left without it. Local leaders of the dispersed Hungarians have been in the meantime offered party jobs and offices in the cities of Novi Sad and Subotica. The plight of the less numerous minorities, such as Slovaks, Romanians and Ruthenians, is left to be discussed and studied by the NGO forums in which the intellectual elites of these populations could also find jobs and access to project funding.

Horse-trading seems to have become the predominant pattern of political behavior in the aftermath of the DOS-coalition (of 16 parties) victory in 2000. In the case of leaders of both multiethnic and Hungarian Vojvodinian parties, it is a strategy by which they secure important ministerial and similar sinecures in the Serbian and Vojvodinian bodies, despite the fact that they have been systematically unsuccessful in promoting the laws that would significantly alter Vojvodina's second-class status in Serbia, and in the face of the fact that they had not been able to mobilize any significant following among the population. Vladimir Ilic, a Belgrade sociologist who analyzes the Serbian political scene after 2000 in the vein of Max Weber's work on political parties, observes that Vojvodinian autonomists are not able to disguise that they are more interested in 'institutional dimensions' of autonomy, which means high executive posts and sinecures, than in its economic dimension, which is otherwise presented as a top priority in the party programs focusing on "economic exploitation of Vojvodina".²⁴ Such politics, in the context of the previously outlined socio-economic grievances of the population that are shared across ethnic lines, can mobilize only the followers of narrow party circles, i.e. the aspirants to high posts. Trade-offs are obviously worth ignoring the needs of (and need

24 Vladimir Ilic, "Maks Veber i politicke stranke u Vojvodini" Max Weber and Political Parties in Vojvodina <http://www.helsinki.org.yu/povelja/pov1199/091199.html>

for) constituencies.

In this tangle of events, Vojvodinian multiethnic and minority parties can claim “victories” without developing any concrete stance toward the issues that would be a direct response to the pressing grievances of ordinary people. Vojvodinian parties seem to have little trust in their own constituency building, and gain confidence only when growing closer to one of the two dominant Belgrade-based party blocks. Not surprisingly, precisely at such times, their pro-autonomy rhetoric tends to become exceptionally radical: in response, indicators of the future abstinence vote in Vojvodina have been rising dramatically in 2002, for the first time after the 2000 regime change.²⁵

It seems that as long as the laws on minority rights or those on reinstating the bits and pieces of the Province’s autonomy can be passed in the Serbian parliament, and as long as relevant posts are being distributed “in good faith”, chances for making the cause of Vojvodinian autonomy politically relevant for its population are minuscule. Simultaneously, a form of compliance “with Europe” will be maintained.

The outlined recent developments in Vojvodina point to the processes which are relevant for an understanding of the relationship between the lack of mobilizational success of Vojvodinian regionalism and the new variety of ethnic politics in Serbia, and the related problems of applying multiculturalism as a theoretical and practical scheme of culture and politics for Vojvodina. The rules of “ethnic” polity access in Serbia, and in the province of Vojvodina in particular, inherited from the reign of Slobodan Milosevic, seem to be surviving in the era of his successors. Horse-trading between the Vojvodinian multiethnic and ethnic minority regional parties seems to have become more relevant than the goal of the province’s economic and political autonomy and the building of a broad political base. Subsequently, the actual grievances of ordinary Vojvodinians are subsumed under ‘ethnic-cultural’ problems and cannot be

25 Dissatisfied Vojvodina residents, Medija center Belgrade analytical service, 27 June, 2001, <http://www.yumediacenter.com/english/as/2001/7/a260701e.asp>

recognized as relevant discontents and forms of identity and solidarity. To these topics, I turn in the concluding remarks.

VII. Broadening the Scope: “Democratic Nationalism”, Multiculturalism, and Multiculturality

In the first week following the 2000 demise of Slobodan Milosevic, a leading Serbian intellectual, close to the party of the Yugoslav president Vojislav Kostunica, outlined in one of the main Belgrade daily papers the doctrine of the new Serbian “democratic nationalism”.²⁶ In this article, he distinguishes between the “wrong” Serb nationalism of Slobodan Milosevic’s era, which is characterized by the authoritarian treatment of its own nation and others and an expansionist-violent agenda. This nationalism is contrasted with an “European” brand of Serbian nationalism, which, according to the author, extols its own nation above others because it is a product of a democratic process and thereby provides a necessary “integrative glue” that comes from the “core-nation” and binds all citizens into a legitimate polity worthy of loyalty and patriotism. In this picture, the blame for the decade of nationalistic wars is squarely put on the shoulders of the dethroned authoritarian regime, and the Serbian nation is presented as a principal victim of Milosevic’s policies: the latter are simultaneously portrayed as the legacy of Communism, which had supposedly created an unnatural break in the Serbian history. The “bête noire” of totalitarianism thus becomes a mantra and an alleged antipode of “democratic nationalists”.

It seems that the latest endeavors of Serbian “democratic nationalists” to “normalize” the majority nationalism by endowing it with integrative and “participatory” features reflect two defensive political agendas: one has to do with the continuous denial of the new Serbian authorities to open a public debate on war crimes and the role of Serb forces in the operations of ethnic cleansing in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo; the other is

26 Svetozar Stojanovic, “Nations, Nationalism, Citizenry”, *Danas*, 14 October 2000.

the intent to co-opt members of the civic, anti-nationalist NGO scene into the ranks of victorious parties. While the latter are being criticized for “patriotism deficiency”, i.e. the supposedly unnatural inability to “criticize other nations”, they are simultaneously invited to establish an alliance with “democratic nationalists”. The strategy of the uniting of the previously irreconcilable blocks – salon nationalist intellectuals and antiwar antinationalist activists – serves to “thwart the tackling of responsibility among those who in the past decade together with the authoritarian nationalists pursued, backed and masterminded the now defeated policy”.²⁷

But there is more to the new Serbian doctrine of “democratic nationalism”. In the last two years, the shaky Serbian coalition has braced itself for the path of reforms. The delayed post-communist integration in the dominant European context brings with it the reality of becoming a part of the European semi-periphery, where the much awaited foreign investment will be, for some years ahead, used primarily for repayment and rescheduling of the debt, rather than for the re-building of the country’s economy and improvement of living standards. In combination with the situation in Kosovo, which is an international protectorate still referred to as “part of the Serbian land”, this dependence of Serbia on international sponsorship comes into a state of affinity with the new ethnicization of issues of democratic citizenship. Bound to respond to every pressure of international organizations for its economic policies and human and minority rights laws (to which the previous regime had responded with isolationist policies and schemes of violence over territory), and forced to neutralize and white-wash their own responsibility for supporting and condoning the war-waging policies of Milosevic, the Serbian elites have found themselves in a vacuum of legitimacy, where nationalism with the face of a “democratic Serb” would fill the void.

The lack of mobilization success by autonomist Vojvodinian parties, which by now should be diagnosed as an abandonment of the goals of the Province’s autonomy, fits into the scheme of this polity access scheme-in-

27 Vladimir Ilic, “Retouching Notions: Normalizing Nationalism”, <http://helsinki>.

the-making. What is abandoned among the goals of autonomy are the existing grievances of the population that have been continuously marginalized by a mix of the radical autonomist rhetoric and the politics of horse-trading and co-optation by the Belgrade-based parties. Now, perhaps even more than before in Serbia, polity access means, among other things, a successful use of “cultural” (ethnic or quasi-ethnic) issues, as only they seem to offer legitimacy, the scarcest resource in Serbia. The rhetoric of protecting regional autonomy, or, in the case of the Hungarian largest party’s leadership, protecting one’s own ethnic minority, means imitation of the new “moderate” Serb nationalists: all parts of this triad have interest in promoting a sum of some “pure” nationalisms – regionalist, minority or majority, at the expense of mobilizing civic or inter-ethnic allegiances and solidarities. The new perceptions of ethnic competition, depicted in Vladimir Ilic’s survey on Vojvodinian minorities and refugees testify to the dramatic effects that this political scheme has on inter-ethnic relations on the ground.

Broadening political participation seems to be the field into which Serbian elites do not dare to venture. In this context, what use can we find for Will Kymlicka’s prescriptions for liberal multiculturalism-nationalism as the basis of democratic transitions in East-Central Europe? First, democracy in this scheme is obviously perceived as a correction of the previously violated or suppressed ethnic identities, which Kymlicka tends to identify with “culture” and “rights”. However, to diagnose ethnonationalist wars in the former Yugoslavia as being caused by the unresolved issues of ethnic autonomy means to turn the understanding of the conflict on its head. As several sociological and anthropological accounts of the breakdown of the Yugoslav federation have shown, the violence that took place in the most ethnically mixed areas of the country was not a spontaneous eruption of ethnic hatreds or an outcome of unsettled issues of ethnic autonomy. It was for the most part imported from outside in the communities “where the lived realities of complex societies most directly contradicted the imagining of political space in ethnically homogeneous terms”. The worst kind of

atrocities, perpetrated by the paramilitary squads, was necessary to destroy the realities on the ground of ethnically mixed communities and their culture. “Violence and threats were necessary to ethnicize a society that had until then not been divided along those lines.”²⁸ In a society that had been characterized by a complex long-lasting social and economic crisis, such as the one that pervaded the Yugoslav society during the 1980s, ethnicity became a vehicle of the consolidation of patronage networks of political control during the transition from the Communist to a pluralist political framework.²⁹ These accounts of the violent and organized character of the breakdown of the Yugoslav state put into serious question the applicability of the thesis that ethnic autonomies and ethnic politics are the best remedies for the condition of “democratic deficit” in the post-socialist and post-violence multiethnic states.

Even if we accept the package of “ethnocultural justice” as a useful impetus for protecting minority languages and cultural institutions, we ought to be reminded that in the arena where individual rights and economic existence are precarious, insistence on collective rights, as an ascribed citizenship marker, may act as further hindrance of democratic participation. The Serbian politics of ethnic majority-minority and region-center trading shows that the interests of local elites in the tenets of liberal multiculturalism-nationalism may be motivated less by their democratization agendas than by their need to bypass the imperatives of broader participation.

Will Kymlicka’s liberal-democratic benevolent state that simultaneously dispenses individual (same for all) and collective (based on ascribed membership) rights is not a reality even in Western liberal states – which had homogenized their ethnic differences not because of their ignorance, but as part of state building agendas. It is, at best, an attempt to make a

28 Chip Gagnon, “Serbs as Victims and Perpetrators of Violence”, paper presented at the *Conference on Comparative Minority Issues*, Vienna, April 11-14, 2001.

29 Anthony Oberschall, “The manipulation of ethnicity: from ethnic cooperation to violence and war in Yugoslavia”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 6 (November 2000), pp. 982-1002.

critical move away from the patterns of discrimination of populations whose linguistic and other cultural characteristics had been used to shrink access to major resources. However, the doctrine of liberal multiculturalism, as the case of Vojvodina shows, may serve precisely the opposite goal, i.e., the transportation of state-majority-nationalist closures to sub-state levels.

In the end, where can one look for reliable barriers against ethnonationalism in an area where “ethnic trade” has proven useful for both authoritarian-isolationist and reformist-globalizing elites? How can the survival of multicultural *individuals* be supported? The only durable option, it seems, lies in the civic sector, among NGOs who would persist in acting as pressure groups upon their elites escaping accountability: by tenaciously researching and publicizing the findings on structural conflict, grievances, cultural preferences, and the rest of realities of the insecure and resilient everyday life. This, then, opens a new line of research on the discrepancies and congruencies between the desirable modes of broad democratic participation and the interests behind the policies of multiculturalism in the post-socialist “transitional” societies and the neighboring and ever closer European Union.

Didactical Questions

Papers:

Hans Vermeulen and Boris Slijper, *Multiculturalism and Culturalism: A Social Scientific Critique of the Political Philosophy of Multiculturalism*

Ana Devic, *Nationalism, Regional Multiculturalism and Democracy in the Province of Vojvodina, Serbia's Multiethnic Haven*

Broader reasons for including these two papers in the curricula of Master's programs in European Studies are that they focus on some of the most debated issues in social science and politics today: the role of cultural identity in shaping state, pan- and trans-state, and civil society politics, and the current European ambiguities with regard to the alleged opposition between nationalism and multiculturalism.

The papers should invite interdisciplinary answers to the following broad questions: What are similarities and differences in current manifestations and causes of ethnic and state nationalisms in the West and the post-socialist Europe? What are the (common or dissimilar) reasons for the increasing articulation of social conflicts in cultural terms in Europe today – East and West?

How helpful is the theory of liberal multiculturalism in unraveling these issues? Can the theory and policies stemming from liberal multiculturalism promote democratization and cooperative diversity, or can they spur ethnic and national particularisms and autarky? What is the role of civic identity and solidarity in combating ethnic and national exclusivism in contemporary Europe?

More detailed theoretical and historical discussions can include the following points:

1. Blurred distinctions between ethnic and civic concepts of the nation
2. The changing role of the State
3. Civic citizenship as a barrier to the confounding of national with ethnic
4. Continuities of socialist and post-socialist ethnonationalism
5. Immigration in the “Old Europe,” “New Right” and “legitimate nationalism”
6. Regionalism and a Common European Space. Confronting nationalism through trans-state solidarity and Action

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