Multiculturalism. The Central European Experience and its Impact on Identity-Formation in a Globalized World

Veranstalter: Conference in the framework of Memory – Remembrance – Identity of the Commission of Culture. Studies and History of Theatre (Austrian Academy of Sciences) in cooperation with the Center for Austrian Studies in Minnesota
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This conference[1] aimed at designing a framework for conceptualising, interpreting and explaining multicultural societies in both historical and theoretical terms. My report sets out not only to summarize the main threads of the conference but also to elaborate the conceptual framework and the future direction of the ongoing project co-organized by the Commission for Culture Studies and the History of Theatre of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (Vienna) and the Center for Austrian Studies (Minneapolis).

The initial Bellagio meeting sought to scrutinize the procedures, practices and languages of identity-formation, assimilation/dissimilation and acculturation in multi-lingual and multi-confessional regions and states. As envisaged in the program the conference participants scrutinized the „methodological nationalism" (Johannes Feichtinger) that permeates current political and scholarly categories of analysis around multicultural societies. Many of these presuppositions rest on the idea that the nation-state constitutes a natural and desirable outcome of historical development. This way of thinking produces a belief that the victorious nation state is characterized by its progressive nature, while viewing polycentric states as gridlocked, ramshackle and ultimately „weak states,"[2] whose polities are not based on a clear set of principles or whose principles fail to percolate into the intellectual and social structures and environments of their citizens. Currently, the nation-state is often praised as the cornerstone of a free and safe global order. In light of the emergence of new global players, the power of post-national (or indeed pre-national) structures of allegiance and power hierarchies, however, it seems particularly beneficial to re-examine „pluricultural"[3] models of negotiation, mutual accommodation and syncretistic identities to the nation-state.[4] To point out the necessity of scrutinizing the role of the nation-state – also as crucial presupposition and operative objective of democracy-building and law-enforcement – may not mistaken as superficial political justification of the historical and theoretical framework designed in the course of the conference: The broader political implications of the research presented at the conference merit further exploration; e.g. the identity formation of migrant denominations both in Europe and North America and of various „hyphenized" groups, with their self-descriptions, styles and strategies of identity politics in the U.S. (Michelle M. Wright).

The participants attempted to explore and refine their theoretical apparatus using case-studies from Central Europe (Istria, Transylvania, Trieste, Trento, Bohemia, Slovenia, Galicia, Bukowina, Hungary), from India, and from the Ottoman Empire. The workshop produced a useful revision and extension of the initially proposed scope of the conference: Firstly, the common task of conceptual clarification and concretisation became increasingly significant in the light of the various ramifications of judicial, educational, sociological and religious concepts and topical fields explored

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[1] I am pleased to express my gratitude to Pieter M. Judson for his invaluable help in the course of preparing this report.

[2] Shalini Randeria offers a redescription of pluricultural states as „cunning states", ead.: Cunning states and unaccountable international institutions. Social Movements and the Rights of Local Communities to Common Property Resources in: European Journal of Sociology 16 (2003), 1, S. 27-60.

[3] Compare Anil Bhatti: Cultural Homogenisation, Places of memory, and the Loss of Secular Urban Space in Helmuth Berking, Sybille Frank, Lars Frers, Martina Löw, Lars Meier, Silke Steets, Sergej Stoetzer (eds.): Negotiating Urban Conflicts. Interaction, Space and Control, Bielefeld 2006, S. 67-81 and id.: Kulturelle Vielfalt und Homogenisierung in Johannes Feichtinger, Ursula Prutsch, Moritz Csáky (eds.): Habsburg postcolonial. Zentraleuropa – Orte Innerer Kolonisierung?, Innsbruck, Vienna, Munich 2003, S. 55-67.

[4] Take the case of e.g. the mufti of the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt issuing a fatwa in the course of the Muhammad cartoon rows.

in the meeting; secondly, the organisers and participants decided to broaden the project's further purview, aiming at a comparative global scale (including e.g. facets of multiculturalism in Russia and South Africa).

I)

The conference was indeed path-breaking in that it applied the tenets of cultural theory on multiculturalism to reconstructions of tangible historical circumstances that involved differing social, confessional and political contexts. Reappraising and scrutinizing the legacy of multicultural empires (Habsburg Monarchy, India, Ottoman Empire) did not mean succumbing to nostalgic mirages. Several presentations demonstrated that imperial imperatives and strategies of consolidation or coercion, which often both presupposed and constituted the existence of allegedly homogeneous ethnic, confessional or prestige-based groups (castes[5], *millets*, monolithic religions [Hinduism], *Staatsvolk*[6]), warrant closer examination. It also became obvious that we need to locate particular power-bargaining, trade-offs, and reciprocal arrangements *among* these groups as well within multicultural and multiconfessional states[7] (Fikret Adanir) (e.g. that there are parochial, particularist identities on a local level opposed to intrusions of a centralizing state but also opposed to neighbouring groups). Thus identity and self-identification became key notions throughout the meeting. These enabled the participants to explain how various identities (empire/state vs. regional, ethnical group a vs. ethnical group b, confession x vs. confession y) were historically non-exclusive, how they had often coexisted without causing the kind of friction or (retroactive) claims to superiority that nationalist political agitators later claimed for them, as in the case of mutual relations on the „language frontiers" in the 19th century Habsburg Monarchy (Pieter M. Judson[8]) and the nationalist focus on schooling as a means to spread national identities and thus promote conflict among groups. The historically widespread *syncretistic* ability to master the codes necessary to move in a plurilingual and polycentric society („code-switching") has been dubbed pluriculturalism (Anil Bhatti), a phenomenon necessarily and conveniently to be distinguished from multiculturalism. It is beneficial and im-

portant to juxtapose the concepts of multiculturalism and pluriculturalism which should not be confused: The capability to manoeuvre in a *complex, syncretistic cultural system*, as pivot of a variety of allegiances, loyalties and overlapping identifications should be clearly distinguished – without nostalgia – from a *coexistence* of petrified, torpid groups.

The term Multiculturalism elicits several associations, from lofty political manifestos to academic „culture wars". Indeed, as the contributions to the meeting made clear , the term multiculturalism could and can – both historically and theoretically, – function as a double-edged weapon: It can exert oppression in that it constitutes groups in an exclusionary sense, congeals categories in the rigidification of its

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[5] See Shalini Randeria: Kastensolidarität als Modus zivilgesellschaftlicher Bindungen? Selbstorganisation und Rechtspluralismus im (post)kolonialen Indien in Dieter Gosewinkel et al. (eds.): Zivilgesellschaft – national und transnational (Jahrbuch des Wissenschaftszentrums Berlin 2003), Berlin 2004.

[6] For this tenet of self-stylization among e.g. – crudely put – emancipated Jewry in the Habsburg Monarchy, see Oskar Grün: Franz Joseph der Erste in seinem Verhältnis zu den Juden, Zurich, 1916 and David Rechter: The Dynastic Loyalty of Austrian Jewry in Klaus Hödl (ed.): Jüdische Identitäten: Einblicke in die Bewußtseinslandschaft des österreichischen Judentums, Innsbruck 2000, S. 189-208, compare Joseph Roth's memorable description of the flock of rabbis courting Francis Joseph on the manoeuvres in Galicia (Radetzkymarsch [1932] Munich 1994, S. 269-271); generally on the imagery of Francis Joseph as overarching identifying figure of the Monarchy as represented in hindsight in the Austrian literature of the interwar period Leopold R. Decloedt: Imago Imperatoris. Franz Joseph in der österreichischen Belletristik der Zwischenkriegszeit, Vienna, 1995. The commemoration of the emperor - as transnational Central-European lieu de mémoire – would merit comparative efforts.

[7] See further Fikret Adanir: Die Schulbildung in Griechenland (1750-1830) und Bulgarien (1750-1878) im Spannungsfeld der ethnisch-konfessionellen Identität, Entstehung der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft und Herausbildung des Nationalbewußtseins in: Wolfgang Schmale, Nan L. Dodde (eds.): Revolution des Wissens? Europa und seine Schulen im Zeitalter der Aufklärung 1750-1825. Ein Handbuch zur europäischen Schulgeschichte, Bochum 1991, S. 431-466 and for the issue of the Partriarchate and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and its implication for the millets id.: Der Zerfall des Osmanischen Reiches in Alexander Demandt (ed.): Das Ende der Weltreiche. Von den Persern bis zur Sowjetunion, Munich 1997, S. 108-128.

[8] See Pieter M. Judson: Guardians of the Nation. Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria, Harvard 2006.

compact, prevents some groups from participating in its framework, (as Pamela Ballinger demonstrated in her studies on Istria[9]), supports a kind of crypto-assimilation to recognized groups for the sake of expediency, and it can produce perpetually compartmentalized „back-to-back" societies (Shalini Randeria).[10]

The meeting made clear that both Europe and the former European colonies may be viewed as being in an entangled „postcolonial" condition – and it also clarified that one might think of the authorities of the empires under purview as instigating a process of „inner colonization".[11] The concrete elaboration of incentives of coercion and common wealth in bureaucracy and of identifications forged in literature in the future project will show whether the presupposition of „inner colonization" is appropriate.

Another field that warrants meticulous examination are the methodological prerequisites, scholarly presuppositions and categories[12] that shaped imperial bureaucracies and the implications these categories had for intercultural cohabitation: both in the processes of colonization – in the case of the Indian Raj with the *Land Survey of India* and many studies in demography, social structure and religious preponderances – and in the case of instilling and inoculating an overarching composite *gesamtstaatlich* identity in the Habsburgs on a popular scale, e.g. with the *Kronprinzenwerk*.[13]

II)

The conference identified several crucial ongoing spheres of interest that the participants plan to explore in future stages of the project, among them:

1) The creation of minorities- horizontal (spatial) and vertical (social) differentiation[14] in a multilinguistic, multiconfessional state, a „minority" in one region is a „majority" in another region, with all hostilities, frictions, idiosyncrasies this might yield – this does *not* necessarily imply invocations of hegemony or beneficial patronage by a strong intercessor group from common descent (forming a majority in another region of the same state). How does this situation of minorities change after the collapse of the pluricultural state to which they had hitherto belonged? Successor states build on clear cut identification of minorities (drawing on the statistical material collected *before* their creation), and subsequently grapple with problems of identification, schooling, language and religious divergences. The apportionment of parliamentary representation as minority could congeal nationality-patterns and result in the creation of ethno-religious parties.

2) The official *premise of* and *request* for reciprocal authorities/representation[15] when dealing with minorities: The state demands a counterpart for negotiation – a tolerable interlocutor created from straw anticipating the state's expectations[16]; this problem impinges on issues e.g. of Muslim schooling and religious prerogatives in many European countries[17]: There is a salient asym-

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[9] Pamela Ballinger: History in Exile. Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans, Princeton 2002.

[10] Compare e.g. Jeremy King on the work of disentanglement of unequivocal identities broken down into distinct nationalities: Budweisers into Czechs and Germans. A Local History of Bohemian Politics 1848-1948, Princeton 2005, and the power-bargaining in the course of the Moravian compromise, T. Mills Kelly: Last best chance or last gasp? The compromise of 1905 and Czech politics in Moravia in: Austrian History Yearbook 34 (2003), S. 279-301.

[11] See Johannes Feichtinger, Ursula Prutsch, Moritz Csáky (eds.): Habsburg postcolonial (supra nota 2).

[12] For India see Matthew Edney: Mapping an Empire: The Geographic Construction of British India, 1765-1843, Chicago, London 1997.

[13] For gesamtstaatlich and nationalism in scholarly compendia in the Habsburg Monarchy see contributions in Endre Kiss et al (eds.): Nation und Nationalismus in wissenschaftlichen Standardwerken Österreich-Ungarns ca. 1867-1918, Vienna 1997 and, most recently, Endre Kiss, Justin Stagl (eds.): Nation und Nationenbildung in Österreich-Ungarn 1848-1938. Prinzipien und Methoden, Vienna, Münster 2006.

[14] Compare Moritz Csáky: Kultur, Kommunikation und Identität in der Moderne in: Moderne. Kulturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch 1 (2005), S. 108-24.

[15] See Muslim Council Britain, Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich, respective websites and publications.

[16] Compare the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) created as quasi-autonomous nongovernmental expert authority in the United Kingdom in spring 2006 to ensure „best practice" for the teaching and preaching activities of British mosques; see http://www.mcb.org.uk/article _detail.php?article=announcement-567 (18.12.2006).

[17] See Tahir Abbas: Muslims in Britain and the decline of civil liberties: the national debate in: Vista: Perspectives on Probation Criminal Justice and Civil Renewal 9 (2004), 3, S. 169-172.

metry in the degrees of organisation, and it would be beneficial to scrutinize the arbitrariness of bestowing the role of a representative/spokesperson for a coherent, consistent „group".

3) The need to distinguish between processes of assimilation and acculturation: Assimilation afflicts the assimilator and the assimilated (via compensatory self-stylisation and anticipative allegiance[18]). It is also important to chisel out the political aspect of assimilation, being stigmatized as insufficient attempt at levelling and accommodation by irredeemably different „others".

III)

The considerations suggested here, both conceptual-theoretical and historical, will assume crucial importance as the project proceeds. Under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation, the meeting clearly understood its task to create conceptual schemes of intercultural negotiating and identity-formation. Following these guidelines, the future project will accentuate problem-solving efforts that circumvent the procrustean strictures of national narratives. The issues at stake – universalist principles of human rights, law enforcement and democracy building as Europeans and Americans respond to the challenges of migration and integration – will continue to inform the project's efforts even more strongly, as it adds further fields of inquiry. The organizers hope to plan the next instalment of the project once again under the aegis of the Foundation. It will focus onpolitical, legal, social, religious strategies in the construction *and* self-descriptions of both autochthonal and immigrant groups in the context of state classifications and regulations. We propose to explore in detail the historical and ideological regulations that shaped these processes of construction (*Volksgruppe*, minority, nationality) and connect the lessons and legacies of these historical constellations to the findings of migration sociology and current problems of immigration. This implies the investigation of intercultural negotiating between groups (whose characteristics and consistency are carefully historiciszed) – paying attention to the power of official authorities – the various ways to guarantee the consistency and authenticity of ethnic groups of diffe-

rent provenance – and to examine the power-bargaining, inner hierarchies, anticipation of clichés and self-stylization on the part of these ethnic groups, both autochthonal and migrational. The essential quality of being „autochthonal" also merits thorough reappraisal and historiciszation (concepts of *Volksgruppe*[19] or accredited „minority"). This is also a strong point in case for the study of pluriculturalism as we may observe new syncretistic identities as well as code-switching in language and lifestyle-patterns in various European countries among second and third generation citizens with migration backgrounds.

The project will also include studies of the Soviet and Russian as well as South African cases and more thorough examinations of intercultural environments and politics in the U.S. than heretofore.

The proceedings of the initial conference will be edited by Gary B. Cohen and Johannes Feichtinger, to be published in a volume in the „Austrian and Habsburg Studies"-series with Berghahn Books (New York/Oxford). The splendid working atmosphere enjoyed due to the excellent facilities and the most stimulating environment provided by the Rockefeller Center and the Bellagio staff decisively contributed to the conference's success and to the participants' ardent commitment to the future project.

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[18] See again Csáky: Kultur, Kommunikation und Identität (supra nota 13).

[19] Compare the nuanced exploration of Gudrun Hentges: Minderheiten- und Volksgruppenpolitik in Österreich in Christoph Butterwegge, Gudrun Hentges (eds.): Zuwanderung im Zeichen der Globalisierung. Migrations-, Integrations- und Minderheitenpolitik, Opladen 2003, S. 149-177.