

Toward 'Politics of Interethnic Coexistence'

Can Europe Learn from the Multiethnic Empires?

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At a time when interethnic conflicts have again become a dominant pattern of social and political interaction in Europe, European Ethnology must concern itself seriously with the problems of interethnic relations and contribute its experience to this societal discourse. Departing from Western intellectuals' nostalgic notions of ethnic harmony in the multiethnic Habsburg and Ottoman empires, the article first outlines the hegemonic and administrative structure of the Ottoman Empire and proceeds to the analysis of the mental predispositions and the structures, the everyday practices and skills that made the relatively peaceful coexistence of such a variety of ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural groups possible for so many centuries. It was the advent of national liberation movements, the founding of Balkan nation-states, and modernization that turned populations into ethnic majorities and minorities and largely destroyed the system of interethnic coexistence. The critical analysis of ethnographic data reveals that in spite of the fundamental differences between the bygone empires and democratic civil societies, there are elements of the traditional system that can – in combination with the findings of Intercultural Communication – be applied and adapted to the conditions of modernity.

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I.

"After the end of the confrontation of systems ... interethnic conflicts appear to become again a dominant pattern of social antagonism," wrote Friedrich Heckmann almost prophetically in 1991.¹ This view was not only shared by other authors such as Huntington (1993, 1996), Axt (1993) or Weiner (1998), but was confirmed dramatically by the realities of the 1990s, both in Europe and elsewhere. Dozens of conflicts have flared up since then, most of them between ethnic minorities and majorities or between religious groups, and many of them have produced intense primal violence (cf. Emminghaus 1998) and devastation. After the collapse of the multiethnic Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, Europe experiences two opposite developments: while, on the one hand, strong efforts are being made to integrate more and more nations into such supra-national organisations as the Euro-

pean Union, there is, on the other hand, a disintegration of multiethnic countries, a "resurgence of cultural identities based on ethnicity, language, race, tradition, religion, and region" (Emminghaus 1998: 126) which has generated a disturbing increase of tensions, conflicts, and violence between these groups.

The reasons for this simultaneous drive for integration and disintegration, for unity and diversity in Europe are manifold and cannot be discussed in detail (cf. Kürti 1997). We must assume, though, that most conflicts are a result of the general "intolerance of the nation-state toward ethnic minorities" (Heckmann 1991), a reaction against the impact of European integration and of economic globalization (cf. Lindner 1994, 1997), and a consequence of the "end of systems" (Axt 1993, Heckmann 1991); for the post-socialist countries we have to add, though, that the rise of ethno-nationalism is one of the

many social, economic, and cultural consequences of the breakdown of the socialist system (cf. Niedermüller 1996), of economic backwardness, and of the frustrated hopes for an instant fulfilment of "the Central European version of the American dream" of affluence (Kohák 1992: 214).

The legacy of socialism will probably haunt the Balkans for a longer period of time, the nation-state will continue to exert its influence, and the dynamic of globalization will certainly grow even further. It is very likely, then, that interethnic, interreligious or intercultural differences, be they real or imagined, be they genuine or a cover for social or economic antagonisms (cf. Kaschuba 1995), will increase rather than decrease in the future. Given this situation, the question is if there are ways and means to manage these differences more adequately and efficiently or, in other words, to reduce the conflict potential of interethnic relations. It goes without saying that the relations between groups or peoples who live close together, either in the same or in adjacent regions or countries, are of the greatest concern.

Interethnic coexistence is a problem that concerns not only politicians, educators, political scientists, psychologists or sociologists. It is, or should be, of particular concern for ethnologists and, in Europe, European ethnologists, who are experts in cultures and ethnicity, but whose voice is seldom heard in the discourse on interethnic coexistence.² The premise of this paper is that instead of criticizing such necessary concepts as culture and ethnicity, ethnologists should actively contribute to this discourse both theoretically (through the clarification of concepts) and empirically (through their direct approach to everyday reality).

Ethnology, and particularly European Ethnology, can make important contributions to this discourse which other disciplines do not provide. In view of the fact that present ethnic conflicts usually have a long history, European Ethnology's typical combination of synchronic and diachronic approaches is particularly valuable for the comprehensive study of interethnic relations and conflicts. Another contribution is the insight that groups and cultures are not

static isolates, but are dynamic and open systems. From this follows, as Mühlmann insisted in 1972, that the study of interethnic influences, exchanges, and relations is at the very heart of the discipline (Mühlmann 1972: 272f.). Such studies should focus not only on general aspects but more specifically on the peoples' actual knowledge and the concrete practices of interaction with other ethnic groups and of coping with diversity, otherness, and external influences. But ethnologists and social anthropologists have so far displayed "a remarkable reserve with regard to the study of mutual influences of neighbouring ethnies", Mühlmann complained (ibid.); and in view of the fact that Europe hosts such a great variety of ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups, the interest of European Ethnology in interethnic relations is rather limited.

One of the reasons for this lack of interest probably lies in the traditional division of labour of the disciplines: ethnology and social anthropology have always concentrated on far-away exotic cultures, while folkloristics and European Ethnology focussed on the 'own' national or regional cultures (cf. Roth 1996: 5). In the last decades, the latter ones have produced a great number of comprehensive and comparative studies of European culture as well as studies of cultural relations, but they concern almost exclusively material or immaterial cross-cultural influences and processes on the macro-level, in other words: cultural elements and their migration, exchange, translation, adoption, adaptation, variation, and change, while the people themselves and their personal interactions and relations largely escaped the attention of ethnologists.

In addition, older research with its typical national focus had an outspoken bias against interethnic relations and cultural influences. German *Sprachinselvolkskunde* of the 1940s, for example, was interested in the ethnic Germans in East or Southeast European "linguistic islands" only insofar as they were supposedly faithful preservers of the "old culture"; cultural exchange with the surrounding ethnic groups was denounced as contamination. The experience of the fatal consequences of this approach instigated Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann (1967)

and Annemie Schenk (1973, 1987, 1994) to make the actual relations between ethnic groups the object of their ethnographic investigations. It was no coincidence, that they chose southeast Europe as their field of interethnic studies, as this subcontinent is certainly the most diverse part of Europe with regard to ethnicity, language, religion, and culture. Their studies at the micro-level of ethnically mixed Romanian communities focussed on societal processes of cultural exchange between ethnic groups, of coexistence and segregation, of ethnic symbolism, assimilation, and "dissimilation", i.e., emphasis on difference with the other ethnic groups (cf. Schenk 1973, 1994). They also included the historical, political, economic, and religious conditions under which the ethnic groups coexisted. Research by southeast European ethnologists and folklorists (cf. Klusch 1987, Pimpireva 1997) as well as studies of the relations between migrant workers and the indigenous population (for Germany cf. Greverus 1988) added the focus on mutual perception and stereotyping, on ethnic boundaries (cf. Keményfi 1998), and on the formation and loss of ethnic identity.

There is no doubt that these approaches were a great step forward; they viewed ethnic groups not as static, but as changing and open entities. With the exception of a few recent studies in Bulgaria (Georgieva 1995, Tepavicharov 1995), they paid less attention, though, to questions of group interaction, of conflict and coexistence, and to the pertinent practices and strategies of boundary maintenance, mediation, and conflict resolution between ethnic groups. More important, the personal interactions and the actual everyday communication between individual members of different ethnic or cultural groups are treated only in passing (cf. Kürti 1997: 41) or they are not discussed at all. Therefore we know little about the communicative and social skills and practices that are necessary for interethnic coexistence, or about its mechanisms. The extant studies seem to have taken the ability to live together and understand each other across ethnic or linguistic boundaries more or less for granted. In addition, their goal was the description and analysis of societal processes, not the appli-

cation of empirical findings to social practice.

Both the European historical experience with ethno-nationalism and the ongoing processes of integration and globalization suggest that there is a need for "cultural politics of European coexistence".³ For European Ethnology, this means not only the necessity to study pertinent cultural policies, but also to discuss the discipline's part in them and its future contribution to translating ethnological knowledge into social and political practice. Departing from my own experience with southeast Europe and with Intercultural Communication, I will discuss how this knowledge can be obtained, and will argue that it can be of use for the goal of interethnic coexistence and cooperation in Europe.

II.

During the war in Bosnia, many people in Western Europe, mostly intellectuals, voiced their admiration for the former "peaceful coexistence in multiethnic Bosnia" that had now been destroyed by the war, and expressed nostalgia for the "old multicultural Sarajevo" (cf. Džaja 1998) and for the vanished multiethnic empires in southeast Europe. What they deplored was probably the vanishing of what they considered a model for their ideal of multiculturalism in contemporary Western societies. This gives rise to the question whether – and what – the European countries can learn from the historical experience of the multiethnic empires. In order to avoid false conclusions and feeding vain hopes, ethnology (and historical anthropology) must take a sober look at history and study – without idealization – the mechanisms of interethnic relations and coexistence. Only on the basis of such historical studies can we determine what social and individual practices people once had and which ones might be useful under the conditions of modernity and civil society.

Southeast Europe, the subcontinent "at the crossroads of Orient and Occident", has for more than a century experienced many interethnic conflicts (cf. Seewann 1995). Labelled the "powder keg of Europe", it belongs, in Gellner's terms (1996: 115f.), in the third of the "four

time zones of Europe". Five centuries of foreign rule turned it into a peripheral region that gradually faded from the consciousness of the European public and that since the 19th century has even become Western Europe's "significant other" (Todorova 1997).

The Experience of the Multiethnic Empires

The historical experience of the Balkans is largely one of domination by outside powers. Since the downfall of the medieval Byzantine Empire, it was the Ottoman Empire in the larger part of the peninsula and the Habsburg Empire in the north, that ruled the subcontinent for many centuries and had the greatest impact on it. Both empires were multiethnic states with large numbers of peoples and ethnic groups. As a consequence, the political elites as well as the populations of these empires developed ways and means to handle this diversity and to cope with it in politics and administration as well as in everyday life. In the following I will focus more on the Ottoman Empire because it covered the larger part of the Balkans and its legacy is still felt to be very relevant (Roth 1988, Todorova 1997).

a. Structures and Strategies of the Multiethnic States

Like every other imperial power, the Ottoman rulers covered the lands which they conquered with a fairly homogeneous and homogenizing super-structure, a hegemonic framework that was relatively irrespective of local differences in ethnicity, religion, language or culture. In the highly centralized and autocratic empire without a clear division between state, society, and religion (or church) the unifying factor for the diverse population was being a subject to the Sultan. In this *ancient régime*, the state was interested in taxes, soldiers, and social order and showed a remarkable indifference toward the demographic composition of its population. People thought of themselves as Muslims, Christians or Jews, as speakers of a language, as members of a village community and family, and as Albanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Gypsies, Karakachans, Serbs, Wallachians, etc. – often in that order.

An important element of the imperial super-

structure were a number of unified institutions. The administrative structure was determined by the *millet* system that was based on religious affiliation. It divided the population of the whole empire into five administrative units or millets, the Muslim one being the largest and most important of them. In this structure, which determined the collective rights and the position not only of each religious group, but also of ethnic and tribal groups, the Muslims were the privileged millet and stood in opposition to the *raya*, the Christian and Jewish tax-paying subjects. Equally important for the Ottoman Empire were the efficient military and tax systems and the highly developed legal system (with its fairly non-partisan kadis). Ottoman Turkish was the unifying imperial language, while modern Greek was the *lingua franca* in southeast Europe. The Habsburg Empire was based on somewhat different but analogous systems of hegemony, with German or Hungarian as the imperial languages. Translation, translators and interpreters played a significant role, as Petioky (1998) has stressed for the Habsburg Empire.

The hegemonic systems created a framework in which there were social groups with clearly defined privileges and obligations, but also a remarkable degree of social mobility which was, however, based on conversion to Islam. The Ottoman elites were unified by being Muslims and speaking Ottoman Turkish, and by their Ottoman way of life (cf. Jelavich 1977, Faroghi 1995); for all parts of the vast empire, Istanbul was the metropolitan centre and model of civilized life from where many unifying influences particularly in the everyday culture spread out; in the same way, Vienna was the centre of the Habsburg Empire. One may sum up by saying that the pre-modern multiethnic states had fairly homogeneous super-structures and were based on a strictly regulated hierarchical structure (Majer 1997) with clearly established social inequalities. But it was this homogeneity and social inequality that permitted, on the other hand, a high degree of ethnic and religious diversity.

b. Everyday Practices of Interethnic Coexistence

Even if we allow for the fact that the majority of the population of both empires was rural and lived in relatively isolated village communities, that there were ethnically homogeneous regions, and that there was a solid layer of shared everyday culture, diversity of language, religion, *ethnos*, and culture was the prevailing feature of the Balkan peninsula. Cultural exchange between the groups, interethnic relations and societal strategies of an interethnic *modus vivendi* were thus a vital necessity. The diversity had to be managed in everyday life, both by the social groups and by the individuals, which required a specific culturally fashioned knowledge and attitudes, social and communicative skills and practices as well as long-term strategies, in other words: a system and a *habitus* of coexistence.

Before taking a look at this system, we must first establish what kinds of interethnic relations existed in the Balkans. The most common ones were resident-resident-relations, i.e., relations between groups who lived together in the same region, town or village permanently or for long periods of time (J. Roth 1997: 97); there were also resident-immigrant-relations, e.g. as a result of the numerous resettlement campaigns in both empires, but they were less relevant because immigrants soon became residents. Apart from these, there were, of course, many resident-stranger-relations such as, for instance, those between residential populations and state officials, excisemen, clergymen, merchants, soldiers, nomadic shepherds or seasonal workers; and finally there were stranger-stranger-relations such as those among travelling merchants or craftsmen. Each of these relations required somewhat different social and communicative skills. In the following I will concentrate on the resident-resident-relations as they were (and continue to be) the most common, but also the most complicated ones that require long-term strategies.

For their everyday life most groups and individuals of the pre-modern Balkan societies needed a certain degree of social competence which, in modern terminology, could be called intercultural competence. This competence developed over a long period of time and was inte-

grated into the systems of interethnic coexistence; when conditions changed, new practices had to be developed and incorporated into the cultural tradition. What did this competence consist of, and what was the socio-cultural knowledge that enabled people to cope with diversity? A definite and reliable answer to this question would require the joint research efforts of many historians and ethnologists. What I can offer here are only some observations and reflections on the basis of the extant research.

Let us first look at the subjectivations, at the socio-cultural knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and concepts. What was the mind-set of people who lived in closed societies with traditional values, attitudes and world views? Was there a specific "mentality" or "*habitus*" that facilitated the coexistence of different ethnic and religious groups? We can assume that the general fragmentation of the population into villages and neighbourhoods, clans and families, and the resulting parochialism, particularism, and familism offered social and mental conditions that were probably conducive to interethnic coexistence.

Another helpful precondition was certainly the fact that most Balkan peoples never had strong religious beliefs or adhered to ideologies. Unlike most West Europeans who favour universalist religious, ideological or moral systems, they rather adhere to a particularistic world-view and ethic based on the interests of their kin or some other ingroup. This basic orientation produced a mentality of tolerance or rather indifference towards the beliefs and convictions of others. In addition, it was not dogmatic Christianity or Islam that prevailed in the Balkans but a folk Christianity and folk Islam with strong common pagan elements that provided a basis of shared folk beliefs (Georgieva 1995: 126). All this contributed to an extremely high degree of religious and ideological syncretism (Filipović 1954, 1960) which included not only the veneration of the same saint or the use of the same temple by Christians and Muslims; it also made different value systems appear compatible and allowed the individual or the family to convert to another religion or to belong to two religions or ideologies at the same time, to one of them in the

open, to the other one clandestinely (such as the crypto-Christians). There is an abundance of syncretistic phenomena in the Balkans, not only in the sphere of religion and folk belief. Syncretism is to be observed in many sectors of the cultural system, making the coexistence of different forms and the adoption, adaptation, fusion, or assimilation of cultural influences a pervasive and continuous dynamic process. Elements of foreign material culture were assimilated into the own cultural system just as easily as behaviours, as the examples of the Romanian Banat and of Bulgaria show: only certain token objects were exempted from this interethnic cultural exchange because they functioned as ethnic markers; usually it was the costume or a part of it that served as a symbol of ethnic identification (cf. Schenk 1973, 1994: 346–348; Georgieva 1995: 119f.).

An important and vital part of this mind-set was that the individuals and groups had a heightened awareness of differences and incompatibilities and that they “knew each other”. This knowledge was accumulated in the course of time and consisted, on the one hand, of factual information about the other groups’ ways, their customs, behaviours, tastes, and their material culture, particularly the ethnic and religious markers; everybody had a knowledge of, and respected, the basic rules and practices of the other religion, e.g. the holidays and food taboos (Georgieva 1995: 122). A sound knowledge of the other groups’ ways and tastes was essential for professionals, traders, and craftsmen who wanted to cater to the needs of several ethnic groups (Klusch 1987, Schenk 1994: 350). On the other hand, all groups had precise ideas and stable stereotypical perceptions of the other groups and ascribed them clear-cut ethnic characters (cf. Kürti 1997: 42, Danova 1995, J. Roth 1996, Höpken 1998, Suppan 1998). These stereotypes, which found expression in everyday language and in many oral genres, were mostly prejudices and could, in case of conflict, stir hatred, but they also provided the individuals with reliable categories for everyday interactions and with unquestioned identities (cf. Roth 1998). On the basis of this everyday knowledge, difference and alienness were transformed into familiar otherness, an

otherness that could be handled in everyday life with the help of formalised rules of social conduct (Georgieva 1995: 120f.).

From these basic attitudes and orientations derived a number of practices and skills, some of which were even institutionalized. There is historical as well as present evidence that in mixed areas there was a high degree of bilingualism and trilingualism for the purposes of simple everyday communication; Georgieva (1995: 121) also encountered specific rules for the choice of the language of interaction based on social status and age. Apart from bilingualism and the wide-spread use of a lingua franca, it is noteworthy that the Balkan languages exerted strong influences upon each other not only through the adoption of numerous loan words, which in itself created a common basis for everyday communication, but also in the morphology and syntax of Balkan languages (“Balkan-Sprachbund”). In addition, people in southeast Europe appear to have developed an increased sensitivity in their everyday interactions, a tendency to rely less on language and to closely observe the para-verbal and non-verbal signals of their communication partners. It will be difficult to find hard evidence for that in the past, but the present situation gives grounds for this assumption.

Interethnic coexistence does not come by itself, but needs the efforts and the good-will of all participants. In order to make it work, the Balkan peoples developed “politics of coexistence”, i.e., social and cultural structures and strategies for the safeguarding of peaceful coexistence and for the reduction of intergroup conflicts. At the local level of ethnically mixed communities, these politics of coexistence persisted up to the middle of the 20th century. Thanks to the field studies of Georgieva (1995) and Tepavicharov (1995) in mixed communities in Bulgaria, we have empirical data on some of the practices of local political elites to handle diversity. Bulgarian communities with Christian, Muslim, and Pomak populations always had, as Tepavicharov (1995) found out, dual or triple power structures, each group having self-rule, its own power centre, and its own leaders. It was an unwritten law that one group never interfered in the other groups’ business, partic-

ularly not in matters of religion where a high degree of incompatibility was taken for granted and accepted.

This tolerance and mutual acceptance was, as Georgieva (1995: 127) has stressed, imposed by history – and it was always in jeopardy. Ethnic, religious and cultural differences always produced misunderstandings and conflicts. The question was not if such conflicts could ever be eliminated once and for all, but if there were adequate ways and accepted institutions of conflict resolution and mediation. The data show that conflict management never aimed at eliminating differences but at establishing mechanisms and enforcing measures of conflict reduction. Conscious efforts were made on all sides to prevent the disruption of the fragile interethnic balance: hotspurs and troublemakers were usually disciplined by their own group, and conflicts were taken out of the contact zone and resolved within the group (Tepavicharov 1995: 134).

The success of interethnic coexistence rested not only on general structures and practices, but to a large extent on individuals who functioned as brokers or mediators between the groups, a class of bilingual men in higher positions such as group leaders, aldermen (*kehaja*, cf. Pimpireva 1997: 183f.), judges (cf. Majer 1997: 127), priests, teachers, but also merchants, craftsmen or migrant workers who had accumulated enough knowledge, experience, and authority to function as mediators. Local leaders in mixed communities were required to have, in addition to the “normal” prerequisites of age, high social status, wealth, integrity, and authority, outstanding qualities as social arbiters; they must have the ability to reconcile the groups, not to stress differences, to be role models, and to use their power prudently (Tepavicharov 1995: 136f.). Under such circumstances it was almost irrelevant what ethnic group the leader of the community belonged to.

Contrary to the romantic ideas of some travellers or modern multiculturalists, there was no colourful medley or intermingling of ethnies and religions. Evidence from all Balkan countries indicates that there were solid barriers or “glass walls” between the ethnic and religious groups which stayed largely to themselves. The

maintenance of strong in-group–out-group boundaries and particularistic thinking in favour of one's own group were and are the rule. For the Ottoman period, Majer noted that “in essential areas the Muslims, Christians, and Jews stayed to themselves, conducted their religious services, celebrated their holidays, sang their songs, wore their costumes, ... and married among themselves”.⁴ This is, for instance, still true for present day Bulgaria, where the “Muslims are separated from the Christians” (Georgieva 1995: 118) because, in the words of an informant, “it is better for everybody to be in command of himself and to stay with his own people” (Tepavicharov 1995: 134). Inter-marriage was the rare exception and was in most countries considered as “unnatural” and a threat to the fragile balance between the ethnic and religious groups because of its high potential for intergroup conflict (ibid.: 138); some groups such as the Karakachans prohibited inter-marriage (Pimpireva 1997: 188). Ritual kinship, however, could extend across ethnic or religious boundaries, usually for practical, economic or “political” reasons of establishing friendly relation with families of another ethnic group.

In parts of the Habsburg Empire, one of the institutions explicitly geared at facilitating interethnic coexistence was the tradition of “exchange children” (*Tauschkinder*). In Hungary and Slovakia, for instance, it was common practice to send children to live with a partner family from another ethnic group for one year: they learned not only the other group's language, but also “their ways” (Liszka 1996). It is here that we have to mention that the knowledge, the attitudes, the skills and techniques of interethnic coexistence were usually acquired in the process of enculturation and socialization in childhood, usually a process of unsystematic, unreflected and intuitive learning-by-doing or, in the terminology of Edward Hall (1959), informal and formal learning. This knowledge about the other groups and how to deal with them gradually became part of the cultural memory and of tradition.

Interethnic coexistence was a necessity that resulted from the fact that ethnic or religious groups occupied more or less the same territory.

The necessity of mastering and utilising this common space for production and subsistence and the dependence on each other put permanent pressure on all groups to cooperate and to make compromises. As for their dwellings, ethnic or religious groups were often spatially separated, mostly in separate neighbourhoods. Towns and cities were more heterogeneous, but again the ethnic groups usually had their own quarters in which each group had its own social structures of kinship and neighbourhood relations (cf. Schenk 1987), its own power structure, and its separate institutions such as churches, schools, and (in the 19th century) clubs and associations. This segregation was, however, mitigated by networks of friendship and neighbourhood contacts stretching across ethnic or religious boundaries. Interethnic contacts in the immediate neighbourhood were of special significance, as families would invite each other regularly on the others' religious or life-cycle holidays, and all of them would observe the traditional norms and customs that were mandatory in everyday life (Georgieva 1995: 122f.), among them the strict rules of hospitality (cf. Stoilov 1995).

Finally it has to be mentioned that in the Ottoman period ethnicity was often related to specific professions, trades or crafts; up to the present day, such divisions can still be observed in southeast Europe with regard to the Gypsies.

While these structures and strategies helped to reduce or even eliminate areas of group interference and conflict inside the community, they were of little avail when the system of interethnic coexistence was disturbed by interference from the outside, for instance by wars, marauding soldiers or resettlement campaigns in the Ottoman Empire (cf. Majer 1997, Ivanova 1993). The outside influences increased dramatically in quantity and quality after the end of the multiethnic empires and the establishment of nation-states.

Interethnic Coexistence in the Balkan Nation-States

It is one of the paradoxes of modernity that the nation-state, in order to safeguard the legal equality and social well-being of its citizens, needs outside borders and a clear definition of

who has access to its resources and who has not. As Heckmann (1991) has pointed out, the nation-state, by its intrinsic logic, tolerates less social inequality and less ethnic or cultural diversity. The homogeneity inside the nation corresponds with, or even presupposes the stress on difference with the outside world, so that national conflicts and the oppression of ethnic minorities appear to be unavoidable consequences.

The Balkans are almost perfect illustrations of this logic. They are, in Gellner's view, the most problematic European region with regard to the implementation of nation-states, because prior to their liberation from Ottoman and, in the north, Habsburg rule, there had never existed nation-states or unified national cultures in that region (Gellner 1996: 115). Instead, the multiethnic structures of both empires and the administrative, legal, military, and political principles on which they rested, had perpetuated or generated a religious and ethnic diversity and particularism which made the ideas and goals of the 19th century fighters for national liberation and independence appear almost absurd. At any rate, the present conflicts and crises in southeast Europe appear to be only the latest evidence of the immense problems of carving homogeneous nation-states out of this most diverse part of Europe.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the multiethnic empires were replaced by a host of sovereign nation-states which were all in need of unifying elements that provided cohesion and identity. Following the logic of the nation-state, they abandoned the centuries-old politics of coexistence and replaced it with a new paradigm in which national borders became the crucial element. While the peoples and nations outside these borders were increasingly viewed as different and hostile, the populations within them were subjected to stringent policies of ethnic and cultural homogenisation. Ethnic and religious groups that had once held (almost) equal rights and positions were turned into majority populations and ethnic minorities. In order to achieve internal homogeneity, the Balkan nations each gave priority to one religion or church and established one unified national culture and one national language which was

taught in a unified educational system and became the standard of the national media and communications systems. Likewise, the social, legal, and political institutions became strong nation-building factors. New indigenous elites formed the unified and unifying backbone of the young nation-states.

Unlike their multiethnic predecessors, the new nation-states were constitutional parliamentary democracies with modern civil societies granting equal individual rights to everyone. Their administration was based on region, not on religion. In the course of several decades, most Balkan nations indeed managed to create a relative uniformity of material and symbolic culture, of values and norms, attitudes and ideals, a national culture which set them increasingly apart from their neighbour countries. The individuals, at least those belonging to the majority populations, began to identify themselves primarily as citizens of their nation-states.

The assimilation of minority groups into the majority population, their exchange, expulsion, or 'cleansing' since the end of Ottoman rule had many consequences. One of them was a general process of forgetting the traditional skills and strategies of interethnic coexistence, a process of un-learning of intercultural competence. In most countries, ethnic or religious groups were drastically reduced in number or confined to marginal areas, so that these qualities were indeed no longer needed. In addition, they were not politically desired; instead, school education was geared at instilling national pride and the feeling of uniqueness of the own national history and culture (cf. Niedermüller 1998, Höpken 1997). The findings of Georgieva (1995) and others show, however, that in areas with larger minority populations the traditional system of coexistence survived until the middle of the 20th century.

In the period of national liberation and nation building, folklore and ethnography thrived because they were instrumental in the creation of homogeneous populations and national cultures. The interest of folklorists and ethnographers lay in the description, collection, study, preservation, and often exaltation of their national (peasant) cultures. This holds true partic-

ularly for the countries of the "third time zone" of Europe, "which presented the greatest problems from the viewpoint of the implementation of the nationalist principle of one culture, one state ... Many of the peasant cultures were not clearly endowed with a normative High Culture at all" (Gellner 1996: 115). As a consequence, "nationalism began with ethnography, half descriptive, half normative, a kind of salvage operation and cultural engineering combined. If the eventual units were to be compact and reasonably homogeneous, ... many people had to be either assimilated, or expelled or killed" (ibid.: 116).

This explains why in all Balkan countries the focus on the national culture was predominant, and why folklore and ethnography were linked to national politics. They had to contribute to the legitimisation and identity formation of the young nations by supplying the evidence of the folk cultural heritage, by nationalising this folk culture (Löfgren 1989, Hofer 1991), and by inventing traditions (Hobsbawm 1983) and national mythologies. Most scholars took their mission very seriously and concentrated on the unifying cultural elements of their nation-states and widely ignored ethnic and other minorities. With regard to the neighbouring countries, they emphasized heterogeneity and even constructed differences and otherness. There were scholars with an international outlook, to be sure, but the paradigm was romanticism with a national perspective (Nau-mović 1998), the lack of comparative research, and the disregard of common Balkan features. It was only logical that cultural diversity, inter-ethnic relations, and the coexistence of ethnic groups and nations remained marginal topics of ethnological research.

Socialism and Ethnic Diversity: a Sad Interlude

The 45 years of socialist rule in most Balkan countries and its handling of ethnic diversity is a problem of its own which cannot be discussed in detail. Communism or socialism as a universalistic and internationalistic ideology is, in principle, indifferent to ethnic or cultural diversity, as its political goals are the creation of a "unified socialist way of life" and a "unified

developed socialist personality" which integrates the "finest elements" of national or regional folk cultures. But as in most other fields, there was a large gap between ideological goals and political realities. Particularly since the late 1960s, the policies of the southeast European socialist countries became increasingly nationalistic, stressing the mainstream culture of their majority populations at the expense of internal differences and ethnic or other minorities. Minority groups were assimilated or, in some countries such as Bulgaria and Romania, disadvantaged, suppressed or even expelled.⁵ The traditional system of interethnic coexistence disintegrated under the impact of the totalitarian system.

The socialist countries thus remained fully in the paradigm of the homogeneous nation-state and kept ethnic groups under a closed lid. It was only a logical consequence, that the study of ethnic groups, of interethnic relations and of interethnic coexistence was inopportune or outright prohibited in this period. The upsurge of ethnic self-awareness and interethnic tensions after the end of socialist rule can partly be attributed to this policy.

Post-Socialist Nationalism and Interethnic Relations

With the exception of former Yugoslavia, the borders of the Balkan countries are at present guaranteed and the national identities are largely established. Yet in spite of this, and of the collapse of the hated totalitarian system, most countries are plagued with nationalism, cultural fundamentalism, minorities problems, interethnic tensions, and conflicts. All this may be a belated "outburst of 19th century nationalism", as some historians hold, but it is more likely that these are the dire consequences of the collapse of the socialist system, the economic chaos and the spiritual void it left behind, and of its policy regarding ethnicity and minority groups. At the same time confronted with radical processes of political, economic, and social transformation and with the impact of Western influences and globalization, most people suffer not only from the hardships of everyday life, but also from a deep crisis of values and identities; for many of them, a regression to their ethnic,

religious or cultural roots appears to offer a solution to their problems (cf. Niedermüller 1996, Roth 1995).

It is very obvious, though, that nationalism, fundamentalism, and ethnic hatred will only deepen the crisis, as the examples of the war in Bosnia and the Kosovo crisis demonstrate. There is general agreement that these are inadequate reactions to the demands of modernity and civil society. Not the models of national isolation and suppression of minorities, but new models and strategies are needed to make ethnic diversity tolerable or even productive. As in their multiethnic past, the Balkan peoples are again requested to "live with differences", not only within their countries, but also on the entire Balkan peninsula and beyond it. It is certainly a hopeful sign that in recent years more and more scholars in the Balkans are turning to the issue of ethnicity and to the ethnic and religious minority groups of their respective countries; a growing number of ethnologists and folklorists have taken up the study of interethnic relations and influences across national boundaries and have contributed to a critical discussion of the ideological premises of their discipline.⁶

III.

The question put forward at the beginning was whether the European countries can possibly learn from the historical experience of the multiethnic empires. After all, both these empires and the European Union are multinational entities in need of "politics of interethnic coexistence". Given the Balkans' record of a century of ethnic tensions and strife, the idea of learning from the Balkans seems almost absurd. We have to keep in mind, though, that ethnic conflicts began to flare up in that region with the decline of Ottoman and Habsburg rule: The largely successful imperial politics of interethnic coexistence had to fail, when the Western concept of the nation-state, national liberation movements, and modernisation destroyed their foundations.

Of course there is no reason to mourn the end of the old multiethnic empires, and the differences between then and now are essential and only too obvious. By way of summary, I will

attempt to juxtapose the two systems and their attitudes to ethnic diversity.

The pre-modern feudal autocratic empires were based on hegemonic and administrative super-structures with a few overriding institutions and systems that concerned the elites far more than the ordinary people. In fact, the state hardly ever interfered in local politics and was indifferent to what religion its subjects had, what language they spoke, and how they lived, as long as they paid their taxes. This high tolerance for ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity corresponded with a high tolerance for social inequality. The societies of the empires were pre-modern and closed, and people lived mostly in rural communities with a high degree of local autonomy, mutual help and control; their social relations were almost exclusively informal and personal. Ethnic and religious differences were highly visible (e.g. through traditional markers such as costumes); identities were clearly ascribed, and there was a heightened awareness and acceptance of differences. The relatively static societies with a low degree of mobility made long-term resident-resident-relations the dominant and typical pattern of interethnic relations, so that a "habitus of coexistence" could gradually evolve and be integrated into the cultural system.

The nation-state, on the other hand, is closely linked to modernity. It is based, in principle, on liberal constitutional parliamentary democracy and an open plural civil society. Modern nation-states are highly complex and are organized by means of numerous nation-wide institutions and systems (executive, administrative, legal, military, infra-structural, medical, commercial, financial, medial, educational, cultural, etc.) which exert a high degree of direct or indirect control and interference – and which put strong demands on every citizen to comply with the rules of the state. In order to safeguard equal individual rights and access to resources, the nation-state has a low tolerance for social inequality, but also for cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. Modern societies are predominantly urban and anonymous, and are largely based on formalized and functional social relations. As a result of its universalistic and individualistic foundations, the modern

state considers ethnic and religious differences as "private business", so that such differences are not or rarely displayed in public. The visible markers of ethnicity have disappeared or been replaced by invisible ones,⁷ and (voluntary) self-identification has become more important than ascription of identity. The resulting low awareness of ethnic and religious difference corresponds with their low acceptance; Schiffauer (1996) noted a "dread of the difference" even among cultural anthropologists. People in modern societies have, and are required to have, a high degree of mobility which has led to a great variety and permanent change of interethnic and intercultural relations: while resident-resident-relations are still important, international migrations, expulsions, world-wide tourism and travel as well as the effects of economic globalization have dramatically increased the number and intensity of resident-stranger and stranger-stranger encounters and relations. It is obvious that this ever increasing mobility and flexibility makes the formation of a "habitus of coexistence" extremely difficult.

In view of these fundamental differences and the complexity of modern societies it seems easy to dismiss the historical experience of interethnic coexistence as totally irrelevant. However, more recent findings of Intercultural Communication research indicate that some of the elements of the traditional system of interethnic coexistence are not outdated and can, with due adaptation to modernity, be applied to modern societies; indeed, some elements even have their equivalent in contemporary societies (cf. Weiner 1998, Giordano 1998). Let me finish by outlining a few aspects.

1. The transformation of threatening alienness into familiar otherness is a very fundamental aspect. It was achieved both on the cognitive and the affective level, on the cognitive one by means of passing on knowledge (including stereotypical knowledge, cf. Roth 1998) about the relevant ethnic and religious groups or neighbouring peoples. This also included the learning of the languages of ethnic groups and neighbour countries, so that there was a class of bilingual and bi-cultural persons. On the affective level, interethnic coexistence was facilitated through a heightened sensitivity

ty for other groups and for their signs and signals. Both aspects of the traditional system are very well applicable to the present situation. Having more knowledge about, and sensitivity for, neighbour peoples and ethnic groups and thus turning their alienness into familiar and manageable otherness is good advice also today; but today, the sensitivity should not only concern other cultures (cultural awareness), but also, and very importantly, the own culture (cultural self-awareness). Intercultural Communication aims precisely at raising these sensitivities.

2. The increased awareness of difference created a greater acceptance of (familiar) otherness, of heterogeneity and cultural diversity. For modern democratic nations and particularly for the European Union, this acceptance of otherness is, as we have seen, a structural problem, but it seems to be an important prerequisite for interethnic coexistence in Europe. It has to be accompanied, though, by the awareness that the degree of accepted difference is clearly limited by the basic norms and values and by the legal codes of the individual nation-states as well as by the political and legal framework of the European Union.

3. The question of social and spatial segregation and of group autonomy is certainly one of the thorniest problems for modern open societies. It is noteworthy that in this respect the reality of modern states corresponds to some extent with that of the bygone empires, but while segregation was then the normal case, it is now considered abnormal and undesirable. Group segregation and the development of parallel societies contradict basic premises of modern societies, but nevertheless ethnic neighbourhoods or ghettos have long become a reality in many West European countries and in North America; in some countries informal parallel power structures of minority groups have already been accepted and integrated into the larger political systems.

4. Interethnic exchange and encounter occurred most intensely and frequently at the grass-roots level of village or neighbourhood contacts, i.e., in small and well-defined contexts, and under the pressure of economic or other necessities. In our open, anonymous ur-

ban societies, such contexts can be found in small communities and urban neighbourhoods, but more frequently and typically in institutions, be they government institutions (schools, hospitals, administrative offices, etc.) or be they non-government institutions (associations, clubs, etc.), and at the work-place (cf. Kartari 1997, Moosmüller 1998) where cooperation is vital. Efforts at creating interethnic coexistence and cooperation must therefore start from, or possibly even be confined to, such small contexts (cf. Kriesberg 1998).

5. Interethnic relations are fragile and the equilibrium can easily be disturbed. Conflict reduction and resolution was therefore a central point in the traditional system of interethnic coexistence, for which there were specific rules and mechanisms. It appears, that the above mentioned modern contexts are also in need of such rules and mechanisms: keeping conflicts out of the contact zone of ethnic, religious or national groups is a rule that certainly applies not only to Balkan villages, but also to contemporary schools, courts of law, joint ventures or multinational teams (cf. Deutsch 1998). Likewise, leaders with a heightened intercultural knowledge and sensitivity and with social skills as brokers and arbiters are needed not only in traditional village communities, but also in urban neighbourhoods, in institutional contexts and at the work-place; in addition to competent individuals, there is also a need for institutions of mediation and contact between the groups.

IV.

It has become clear that under the conditions of modernity and particularly of the greatly increased variety and fluidity of interethnic and intercultural contacts, the repertory of the traditional systems of interethnic coexistence is useful for the solution of present problems only in a limited and more general way. This reduces the possible contribution of historical and ethnological studies, but it is here that Intercultural Communication can help. This new discipline can add the expertise which it has gained through the study of face-to-face communicative interactions between individuals

and groups belonging to different cultures (cf. Roth 1996). The discipline is application-oriented insofar as it aims at teaching individuals the competence to act adequately in such situations. The focus of Intercultural Communication on the synchronic micro-level study of present communicative acts is a great asset, but it is also a limitation, because it largely ignores the macro-level processes, the political and socio-economic contexts, and the historical dimensions of such interactions on which ethnological interethnic studies usually focus. It is evident that the two approaches complement each other almost ideally and that their combination offers the deepest understanding of interethnic relations and intercultural interactions. Both disciplines, European Ethnology and Intercultural Communication, should therefore join forces to contribute to politics of interethnic coexistence within and between the European nations.

But it is precisely the awareness of the historical, the macro-political, and the socio-economic conditions that cautions the ethnologist. To a very large extent the success of interethnic coexistence depends on the conditions laid out by national policies, but these policies are limited by the principles on which the nation-state rests. Modern nations cannot copy the multiethnic empires' policy, but they can move toward a greater acceptance of diversity – provided they have established a proper frame and adequate conditions for it. The unbiased analysis of historical and ethnographic data in conjunction with Intercultural Communication research can contribute to this end. The findings presented in this article may disappoint those who hoped to gain a blueprint for a harmonious multicultural world, but they may prove helpful for those who look out for structures and elements of realistic "cultural politics of European coexistence".

Notes

1. Heckmann 1991: 51: „Nach dem Ende der Systemkonfrontation mit ihrer Ausstrahlung in fast jede Konfliktstruktur auf der Welt scheinen inter-ethnische Konflikte global wieder zu einem dominanten Muster gesellschaftlicher Auseinandersetzung zu werden.“

2. For example, among the 40 authors of the representative „Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence“ (Weiner 1998) there is not a single cultural anthropologist or ethnologist.
3. This was the title of one of the sessions of the conference of Ethnologia Europaea in Berlin on Sept. 26–28, 1998.
4. Majer 1997: 128: „In wesentlichen Bereichen blieben also die Muslime, Christen und Juden unter sich, begingen ihre Gottesdienste, feierten ihre Feste, sangen ihre Lieder, trugen ihre Tracht, studierten ihre frommen Bücher und heirateten untereinander.“
5. For Bulgaria's ethnic policy towards the Turks, Pomaks and Karakachans, cf. Höpken 1986, Silverman 1992, Ivanova 1993, Pimpireva 1997.
6. Apart from the works cited above see the report volume edited by Zhelyazkova (1994) and the first three volumes of the journal *Ethnologia Balkanica* (1997, 1998, 1999).
7. Ethnic and religious affiliation is usually internalized (in the form of convictions and ideologies), or it is played out in voluntary associations or in private religious education, etc.; at the most it is publicly displayed in a folkloristic fashion at festivals and other performances. This invisibility of ethnic and religious affiliation in modern everyday life partly explains the uproar in many European countries about the „demonstrative“ headscarves of Muslim women.

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