

## CULTURAL INTEGRATION AND NATIONAL ORIGINALITY OF CULTURES

**Maria Wuketits**

*University of Vienna, Austria*

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### Summary

The changed social and political order (the processes of decolonialization and the emergence of new independent countries, the fall of the Iron Curtain) has led to a shift in the hierarchy of ideologically relevant factors, raising cultural and ethnic issues. The problem of the relation between cultural integrative developments and national cultures is an example of the changed social-political paradigm. At the same time, it is an illustration of major controversial tendencies of the present day. On the one hand, these are the processes of globalization and homogenization on various levels of life. On the

other hand, we witness an increasing national self-consciousness, founded on stronger perceived feelings of ethnic and cultural belonging and resulting in a reaction to the global movements, leading often to extreme ethnocentrism, nationalism, and militantism. The core of these controversies could be reduced to the old problem of the dichotomy 'we' and the 'others' determining the traditional 'inclusion - exclusion' model of social structuring. This social differentiation is realized mainly on the basis of ethno-cultural and national differences, ethnos, culture, and nationality being major identity formation factors. The current tendencies of globalization and homogenization, realized more often than not in the form of Americanization and Westernization, are perceived as a real threat for national cultural identities, which is a good reason for the wide-spread ethnic conflicts within nations and among nations. These conflicts explain the current more pessimistic prognoses, which view the future of humankind as cultural polarization and a 'clash of civilizations'.

The problem of cultural development and the fate of national cultures most obviously should not be formulated as an 'either - or' question, i.e., 'cultural integration' or 'national cultures'. Rather, it has to be solved in the framework of a model of integration, preserving the variety of local cultures. The goal should be a multicultural, pluralistic society, integrated globally with respect to freely shared advantageous achievements in economy, technology, social policy and culture. The right of difference should be respected and protected; the differences looked upon as a dialectical part of a whole, and not are interpreted in terms of incompatibility or racism.

## **1. Introduction**

The current tendencies in the development of humankind bring forward questions about the future forms of sociality and mode of peoples' co-existence. Familiar notions like community, nation, state begin to lose their habitual meaning and require rethinking. Values like democracy, humanity, human rights, equality, and emancipation, which have come to be taken for granted, at least in the so-called Western countries, are seen nowadays from a new perspective and wait to be defined in a cross-cultural way. Concepts like world system, globalization, and post-modernity, among others coined to depict these tendencies, are still used quite loosely and, indeed, in contradictory fashion. The theoretical reflections on the phenomenon of culture with all its aspects are hardly an exception. The changed social and political order (e.g. the processes of decolonization in the years after World War II, the fall of the Iron Curtain), and the new global paradigm have led to a shift in the hierarchy of ideologically relevant factors, bringing culture into the first ranks. Nowadays, one speculates about the tomorrow of humankind in the terms of cultural identity, cross-cultural relations, migration of cultures, and stronger than ever cultural diffusion. The gamut of theories varies from pessimistic views about the incompatibility of cultures and the inevitable 'clash of civilizations' to ideas about homogeneous global culture to utopias about the world-state. Without doubt this theoretical chaos also results from intentional or unintentional one-sidedness, biased interpretations, or simply from wishful thinking. The true problems, however, grow out of the soil of the examined realities themselves, out of their complexity, dynamics, and controversial signals. Non-ambiguous and more or less clear in this context remain questions waiting to be answered: How does globalization affect culture in general and national cultures in particular? Would globalization result

in the uniformity of a popular, mass culture? Or would it tolerate and encourage the diversity of individuals, communities, nations? Does globalization mean cultural integration? If yes, what are we to expect - a homogenization, hybridization, or a kind of a global culture taking no account of the existing contemporary cultural traditions? Would homogenization mean Americanization, or Westernization? What will happen to ethnicity and cultural differences? What is the future of the right of self-definition and self-determination, the future of a particular personal and collective identity? What about the right of origins, of history? Will globalization constrain or, on the contrary, liberate individualism, individual choice and action? The questionnaire could naturally be extended. This small sample of problems, however, is more than sufficient to show the complexity of the phenomena involved and, of course, their huge impact on the future. The complexity is also reflected on the theoretical level, as already mentioned. Unfortunately, not only with respect to the problem-solving, but also with respect to the definitions of major concepts as well.

## 2. Some Basic Issues

In the specialized sociological, socio-political, anthropological literature one comes across many widely known conceptions of major notions, like culture, ethnicity, nation, nationality, etc. What follows is an attempt to offer working definitions of some of the key terms to be used. The goal intended here is not only to achieve clarity of terminology. The explanation of these concepts is aimed at more clearly presenting the complex relations and interdependencies between the realities, which are hidden behind the terminology. Hopefully, this effort will bring a better understanding of contemporary cultural processes.

### 2.1. Culture

In 1952 Kroeber and Kluckhohn published *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, in which they compiled 157 existing definitions of culture. It can naturally be assumed that since that year the number has grown significantly. The main reasons for the enormous number of definitions are without doubt the different approaches to the examined phenomenon as well as its complexity. Thus the views vary according to the perception of culture as, for example, the sum total of modes of life and habits (here the well-known and often used definition of E. B. Tylor's definition from 1871(!) should be mentioned), or generating ideas and mental systems, or, a combination of both - thus the *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines culture as 'the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior'. The standpoints vary in the distinction of lower and higher activities - popular and high culture - and in approaching culture in terms of ideas as opposed to actions, etc.

In the context of the problem of cultural integration and its relation to national cultural inheritance and specifics, the following characteristics of culture seem to be relevant:

- It is a way of human existence: a *differencia specifica* of the being of man.
- It possesses continuity: culture is rooted always in the past, in the history, the latter determining to a great extent the contents of human life. Culture is the link between past, present, and future.

- It has locality in time and space: as such culture is bound to a particular past and present of a particular group, community, or other forms of social organization.
- It is of durability: in spite of adaptation and changes, diffusion and acculturation, culture brings relative stability in the parameters of human life.
- It is an identity-forming factor: on the basis of the above mentioned characteristics culture contributes to the formation of identity - both personal and collective.

In this sense culture could be (functionally) defined as the sum total of cognitive, axiological, and deontological practices codifying meaning and sense in the social actions and providing identity for the social performers. (See *Theory and History of Culture*)

## 2.2. Ethnicity

Ethnicity is defined as an ethnic quality or affiliation. Etymologically it originates from the Greek word 'ethnos', the latter meaning nation, people, caste, tribe. By the term 'ethnicity' one understands a feature, a characteristic of belonging to a group of people (an ethnic group) possessing a particular combination of physical and mental traits as a product of a common (cultural) tradition and heredity. Ethnicity sets apart a social group within a larger population on the basis of this group's common race, ancestry and language, culture and history, and territory of initial origin. In this sense, the ethnos inevitably also includes, together with the rationalized parameters of commonness, a set of emotionally charged myths and symbols, values and memories.

Ethnic belonging gathers importance especially in a time of crises and danger for the group. At such times, ethnicity realizes itself as a symbol of stability, security, and a source of civil courage, which explains its priority in the process of identification. The present day witnesses a growth in ethnic consciousness and a stronger than ever ethnic self-determination due to the globally spread doctrines of human rights, freedom, equality and democracy. This development, which in itself is positive, could prove to be a source of conflicts in the contemporary society, featuring extremely high ethnic diversity.

Ethnicity has proved to be quite ambiguous both as a scientific term and as a practical application, as label. As in the case of the concept of culture, there exists no unanimity with respect to the definition of ethnicity. The way one approaches ethnicity depends on the choice of its primary characteristics. Thus, there are definitions based on objective factors such as common origin, common history, or on other secondary characteristics, like language and customs. Then again, there are definitions founded on subjective factors like the 'we'- feeling of the members of an ethnic community. Another group of problems could be ordered under the item of 'labeling' difficulties. They originate, among others, from the complexity of the 'subject - object' relation, which in this context reveals itself on the level of the dichotomy 'we and the others'. The ethnical interpretation of ideas and actions by 'we' normally does not coincide with the ethnical interpretation of the same ideas and actions by the 'others'. Yet other difficulties arise from the not always clear interrelations between 'ethnicity' and 'nationality'. (At a first glance the problem might seem only terminological. However, a lot of present day

political conflicts have to be explained on the basis of the differentiation between these two concepts, as will be shown presently.)

### 2.3. Nationality

Nation and nationality are often tautologically defined. Thus nation is looked upon as a politically organized nationality, while nationality (in the legal sense of the word) is determined as a membership in a nation or a sovereign state. Chronologically, the consolidation of a nation precedes the political and social realization of nationality. Both notions have a conventional and functional character, and reflect abstract entities. Nevertheless, they have come to life on the basis of natural developments and needs.

The nation-state of today is a relatively modern phenomenon and is connected with the processes of industrialization and the development of capitalism. Its roots, however, are to be looked for in the pre-modern ethnic consciousness. The impetus for its formation is the necessity of securing militarily, politically, and legally the progressive functioning of the community. The mode of inclusion and exclusion follows the old, phylogenetically proven principles of loyalties and priorities of common place and kinship, of common culture. People sharing the same loyalties, priorities and sense of identity - a collective identity - consolidate themselves into a nation in the framework of a state, the latter limiting and including them on a common territory. The nation-state guarantees to its nationals political and economic rights and privileges, and brings them within the scope of international law. The notions of nation and state normally go together, yet they play a different role in the identity-forming processes. Although nation is defined by some as 'an imagined community', it nevertheless stands for the stable and durable identification factors, for being human as a cultural entity, and renders substance to the concept of nationality. The state, on the other hand, has formal-political functions, performed through a set of institutions exercising public authority.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

**Maria Wuketits**, born July 30, 1955 in Kuonino (Bulgaria). She studied philosophy and languages (English, Russian) at the University of Sofia (Bulgaria), where she received her Ph.D. in 1982. She worked at the Department of Philosophy at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and at the University of Sofia, and was fellow student at the Russian Academy of Sciences. She also lectured at the Interuniversity Center in Dubrovnik. Since 1990 she has lived in Austria and worked at the Institut für Sprachwissenschaft as well as at the Karl Popper Institut at the University of Vienna. She has published numerous articles on topics in philosophy of technology, social philosophy, and political philosophy, and is also working as translator and interpreter.