The Baltic Sea Region
Cultures, Politics, Societies
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1. The claim of ethnic groups

In a multicultural society various groups often raise demands or claims with the intention of improving the standing of the group vis-à-vis the state and other groups of society. In a multicultural society of a liberal-democratic kind, these claims are raised within the framework of a more or less organized and open public dialogue. An important objective of a public dialogue is to identify morally relevant characteristics of various ethnic groups. These characteristics motivate different forms of attention to the ethnic groups, which may find expression in terms of land or property rights, rights to freedom of religion, language and educational rights, and certain forms of representation in political institutions.

Some salient characteristics of ethnic groups are size, territorial dispersion, border location, aboriginal status, historical standing, vulnerability, degree of self-identification and organizational structure, and cultural distinctiveness or cultural distance from the majority culture. An ethnic group may have a specific characteristic that motivates a certain form of attention to their demand for cultural preservation. Some groups may also have faced a grim history of discrimination which may motivate certain group-targeted measures such as “positive action” or “affirmative action” in the American sense of the term.

An ethnic group may, for example, be concentrated as in the case of the Russian population around Narva in Estonia or in Riga, Latvia. The controversies may be based upon Russian claims that are seen as too “distant” from the perspective of the Estonians or the Latvians. Another type of issue may have its origin in the question of vulnerability. How vulnerable is the Russian community given the new Estonian or Latvian state? Do they have a strong culture on their own and/or do they have support from “outside”? Another matter is the feasibility of the Russian claims when they are not too ideologically distant vis-à-vis prevailing Estonian or Latvian ideas concerning the character of the new society. All these cases bear traces of reference to certain common values in the dialogue between the ethnic groups. On the basis of a certain characteristic such as size or native status, a demand for cultural preservation from an ethnic or national group may become urgent in order to fulfil a certain value.

Territorial minority status and cultural distance are associated with the values of commonality and the provision of public goods. If an ethnic group is a territorial minority and regards
itself as alien in terms of culture vis-à-vis the majority culture, the group may have a case for independence or sovereignty. Otherwise the commonality in society may be threatened. In addition, considerations of the public good may be relevant. How easy is it to maintain the provision of a certain public good for the different ethnic groups with the new independence? Could they, for example, provide enough services in terms of security or environmental goods?

The border location of an ethnic group may introduce considerations about general security in the area. How will people from the same ethnic group across the border react to different measures? If an ethnic group is a border minority it may have characteristics such as non-dispersion and may also be more or less non-vulnerable if it has close ties to the same ethnic group across the border. Further, the degree of self-identification and organizational structure are relevant for the issue of self-government.

Issues concerning the vulnerability of the ethnic group may be connected to values such as the maintenance of cultural diversity overall in a multicultural society. Relevant values also include autonomy and prosperity for people in the ethnic groups. The question of the size of the ethnic group may be linked to values such as stability or social peace, which may be threatened if the neglected ethnic group is considerable in size. Further, the feasibility of the claims may be related to values such as efficiency or general welfare.

Other morally relevant features of ethnic groups are native status and historical standing. If an ethnic group has existed in the region from the earliest known period or from an early period, the assumption is that the region plays a crucial role in the self-identification of the people. The Saami population is a good example in this case. Even though they have lived a nomadic life for long periods, they identify themselves strongly with northern parts of Finland, Norway and Sweden. Conditions for identity may be seen as something valuable and thus justify the recognition of the special status of an indigenous group or a national minority (or a group with an old historical standing) within a certain area.

The distinction between geographically isolated and non-isolated minorities is relevant today for the issue of cultural autonomy (or sovereignty) if the minority is culturally different from the majority group. A minority has a stronger case for cultural autonomy when the group lives isolated from the majority, so that it will not come into conflict with the majority population. However, the question is whether this distinction between isolated and non-isolated minority groups is morally relevant in times when communication has become more intense and global. It may be a question of degree, but sooner or later an “isolated” minority group will encounter the majority population. If the groups are culturally different, conflicts of value will exist and they will have to be resolved. Complete cultural and political autonomy for the isolated group may then not be a feasible option.

These are some examples of features of ethnic groups in public discussions that make it plausible to assume that some common values linger on in the background of the dialogue. The different groups have to make a case, and this cannot be done without reference to something that is shared among the participants in the public dialogue, i.e. some shared values. The three crucial questions in assessing the claims from different minorities are: (1) what are the characteristics of the groups, (2) what kind of values do the groups make their case from, and (3) what form of claims do the groups raise against the majority culture?
2. An overview of models

The most well-known models of immigrant or minority integration are the majority-conformity (or assimilation), melting-pot and cultural pluralism models.

The majority-conformity model is simply the statement that the minority groups should be assimilated into the majority culture. There are different ways of classifying assimilation. One theory of assimilation that is still influential has been formulated by the sociologist Milton Gordon. Gordon describes assimilation in terms of different sub-processes. An early phase is cultural assimilation or acculturation, in which the minority group conforms to the culture of the dominant group. Another phase is marital assimilation, where members of the minority groups marry members of the dominant group. An example of marital assimilation is the marriages of Finland-Swedes to Finns. Structural assimilation is regarded as a large-scale entrance into the institutions of the majority group. This phase presupposes the acceptance of the minority by the majority in various primary groups. Civic assimilation implies an absence of value and power conflict between the majority group and the minorities. The majority-conformity model may be expressed in strong terms, and it may also imply that ethnic differences should be watered down. The ideal is then the ideal of an ethnic homogeneous nation state. But generally in a society of a more liberal kind, the assimilation or majority-conformity model is expressed in cultural and not in ethnic terms.

The underlying assumption in the former kind of model is that society needs a certain degree of cultural homogeneity in order to maintain, among many things, stability and some feasible “lingua franca” culture. Many other arguments may be presented in terms of justice, for example. The majority culture may claim that it is unjust that a society which has been built up and organized by the majority group should now be re-organized on the basis of the interests of newcomers that may not have the new society as their primary focus of identification. The majority group could say that it is enough from a perspective of justice if the immigrant groups are allowed to live there, and enjoy the same social and political benefits as the majority population. Especially if the minority groups also have their home countries to return to.

The majority-conformity model provokes questions about the value of the autonomy of various ethnic groups. On the basis of this ideal it is often assumed that an ethnic group should be able to pursue its own way of life without any coercion for absorption into the majority culture. However, the autonomy ideal needs to be qualified if various groups should be able to live together in a shared society. The different groups need, in many walks of life, a shared “lingua franca” – culture, for example, in the case of language and in certain spheres of education. This lingua franca culture need not be (and many people would say – should not be) in every respect the culture of the majority population. Apart from a shared language, which is often the language of the majority, other elements may be seen more as joint ventures where both sides – the majority and the minorities – need to make certain compromises if the shared projects should be feasible in the long run. The identification with the overall society may also be stronger from the perspective of a minority group if the members feel that they are able to contribute to the shared enterprises, not at least in the cases of the norms and the visible cultural customs of society. If a state has allowed minorities to enter society, and have accepted them as full-blown members, this also means that the country belongs to the minorities as well as to the majority population. The minorities should then have the opportunity to influence the institutions of society regardless of the historical standing of the groups in question. If the minority is a historical one or an indigenous population, this may also affect what kind of cul-
tural claims are realistic to make – especially in the case of territorial rights.

From a perspective of global justice, certain values or goods should not be seen as exclusionary in the sense that they only belong to the majority population in the country (or the historical minorities) in spite of the fact that they have been “produced” by the native populations. A value with more global dimensions could be, for example, society’s specific potential of being a secure haven for political refugees, and this presents a motive for being more hospitable towards groups that have their historical origin in another part of the world.

A different model is the *melting pot* model which could more or less harmonize well with the idea of a minority sensitive “lingua franca” culture. This model also emphasizes the need for unity in a society, but the unity emerges in different ways through a mutual, autonomous interaction among different immigrant groups or historical minorities. The various ethnic groups become involved in a pooling of cultural traits, and a new blend emerges from the diversity. A famous formulation of this ideal was made by the 19th century American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson: “so in this continent – asylum of all nations – the energy of Irish, Germans, Swedes, Poles, and Cossacks, and all the European tribes, of the Africans, and of the Polynesians, will construct a new race, a new religion, a new state, a new literature, which will be as vigorous as the new Europe which came out of the smelting of the Dark Ages...” (Abramson 1980, p. 152)

The melting pot model raises questions about the value of diversity itself. Why should we strive for unity in all spheres of society? Is cultural diversity not something intrinsically valuable, can diversity also lead to cultural and moral progress? Some pluralist writers were influenced by 19th century romanticism, which emphasized the value of cultural differences.

One may also ask whether different groups participate in the process on equal, autonomous terms. According to the melting pot ideal, everyone should be involved, minorities as well as dominant cultures. But will not majority groups prevail and dominate the minorities in a way which makes it hard to distinguish the melting pot model from the conformity ideal? The response is to emphasize the need for cultural minority rights which make it possible for the more vulnerable minorities to cultivate their more specific cultural traits. A mosaic of differences is a possible metaphor for this ideal of cultural pluralism. This metaphor has mainly been used in Canada in order to describe multiculturalism. Other metaphors common in the debate are “orchestration”; by the 1960s the image of the salad bowl replaced other metaphors. The different cultures are seen as necessary parts of a valuable whole. The cultural distinctiveness is not officially meant to be a politics of
negative segregation which neglects values such as social equality. Cultural differences should be allowed to exist at the same time as social equality between the groups should be achieved.

The model of cultural pluralism is difficult to pin down. It may be interpreted as the statement that a society should have a climate which encourages every ethnic minority group to retain its individuality. As it stands, the model is imprecise and indeterminate. It needs to be spelled out. Within what kind of societal context is the pluralism supposed to exist? According to Horace Kallen, democracy allows people to develop their own cultural heritages. The cultural pluralism principle in this formulation assumes, then, that people have something in common, namely, democratic rights within a shared public arena, which allow them to preserve their cultural diversity. One could also say that the ideal of cultural diversity presupposes that the different groups of society meet each other and exchange ideas within shared activities in society, many of them located in a shared civil society. Cultural, recreational and scientific enterprises could, for example, present important meeting places for members from various minority groups.

3. Cultural pluralism

So far we have been operating with political responses to an assumed diversity within a society. It could be suggested that many multicultural societies have implicit views about common goods that shape the public sphere, and which also define the societal contexts where pluralism should be encouraged. The diversity may, in other words, be a spurious diversity or a diversity that actually presupposes some common values. As Frank Wong has expressed it: “It is not a multicultural community that we seek; it is an intercultural community, where different groups engage each other with united purpose. We seek not a community of the lowest common denominator, where differences are tolerated and sometimes sullenly accepted, but a community of the highest common denominator, where difference is an enriching resource that leads us to a fuller understanding of what is universally true”. (Wong, 1992, p. 45)

One potential common ground presents itself in the concept of culture. Why does culture matter? There are several plausible reasons different ethnic groups in a multicultural society might accept. Culture matters because it provides the grounds for people's identities. Hence, it can also create a sense of belonging. Culture in a broader sense defines a set of spheres within society, such as family institutions, professions, and religion, which provide individuals with different roles. The role models constitute parts of their identities. A culture framework also provides material for expressing life-views, religious allegiances and in more general terms, human creativity. If we assume cultural diversity of some form, not necessarily a radical one, the availability of cultural options enhances the autonomy of the individuals. Diversity may also make it easier for individuals to give voice to their identities in a changing environment. A popular argument is the argument from intellectual and moral progress. Some kind of diversity is necessary in order to make room for progress in art, science and morals. These arguments for diversity could more or less be seen as shared commitments among different ethnic groups (and other “identity groups”) who enter a specific form of public dialogue. The problem with this form of public dialogue is how to strike the right balance between diversity and cultural homogeneity.
The acceptance of cultural pluralism also means respect for the identities of people from different ethnic and religious groups, for example sincere expressions of life-views. Mutual respect can evolve on the basis of recognition of the value of having a life-view or a religion. Mutual respect is also based upon the recognition that life-views and religious allegiances are dependent upon diverse histories of the ethnic groups. Furthermore, respect for different identities is based upon the will to see people in ethnic groups as participants in a common project, i.e. to become citizens with shared responsibilities and rights in a common society. This objective puts constraints upon diversity. Tolerance or respect for identities cannot be so extensive that it undermines the possibility of building up a community. What is excluded is a respect for a cultural identity that encourages polarization and fragmentation within society. Respect does not include respect for groups that promulgate complete anarchy or racial segregation.

Table 12. Some Historic Treaties to Protect Religious Minorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Treaty</th>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Minority</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1573</td>
<td>Confederation of Warsaw</td>
<td>Protestants and Roman Catholics in Poland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1598</td>
<td>Edict of Nante</td>
<td>the King of France</td>
<td>Catholics and Protestants in France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1606</td>
<td>Treaty of Vienna</td>
<td>the King of Hungary and the Prince of Transylvania</td>
<td>Transylvanian Protestants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1648</td>
<td>Treaty of Westphalia</td>
<td>France and the Holy Roman Empire</td>
<td>German protestants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1660</td>
<td>Treaty of Oliwa</td>
<td></td>
<td>Protestants and Roman Catholics in Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1763</td>
<td>Treaty of Paris</td>
<td></td>
<td>Roman Catholics in Europe and Canada</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Religious minorities were the first to receive formal protection, as early as in the 16th Century.

**Statute of General Tolerance (The final Act of Confederation of Warsaw, 1572):**

Whereas in our Common Wealth there is no small disagreement in the matter of the Christian Faith, and in order to prevent that any harmful contention should arise from this, as we see clearly taking place in other kingdoms, we swear to each other, in our name and in that of our descendants for ever more, on our honour, our faith, our love and our consciences, that albeit we are *dissidentes in religione*, we will keep the peace between ourselves, and that we will not, for the sake of our various faith and difference of church, either shed blood or confiscate property, deny favour, imprison or banish, and that furthermore we will not aid or abet any power or office which strives to this in any way whatsoever...
4. Dialogue and commonality

A multicultural society presents, in other words, a challenge to different groups to formulate a common framework given the new situation. The ambition is to put ethnic identities into a wider context, and to find a new kind of shared identity in the multicultural situation. This new identity does not need to exclude or ignore older cultural identities. However, the project of formulating a sense of common citizenship could, as was said earlier, make it necessary for certain groups to downgrade some features of their former identities and interests. This is a process of give and take among the participants in the public dialogue. Some cultural interests must be relinquished in order to achieve commonality. A plausible strategy from the majority population in a country like Sweden is, for example, to take seriously the religious interests of the Muslims. Facilitating the practice of Islam through constructing more mosques, could make them more inclined to accept certain features of the majority culture.

The existence of the public dialogue in a multicultural society is based upon the will to develop a common society. When a group finds that it is not possible to compromise a certain custom or lifestyle, they may find that it is no longer possible to participate in a dialogue with the majority group and the other minority groups. The only solution may be some kind of cultural sovereignty. It is important to stress that a sincere reflection upon one’s identity is necessary for an evolution of a common society. The foundation for one’s identity needs to be scrutinized to see if it is possible to downgrade certain roles or identifications that clash with a feasible vision of commonality. Culture-based identities should be exposed to open dialogues. The content of an identity needs, in other words, to be shaped in interaction with the world, and not be protected in a way that neglects other people’s needs and interests.

The participants in the dialogue must show respect for the seriousness and the sincerity of personal identities, even though the foundation for the identities may be scrutinized and challenged in discussion. The sincerity of the fundamentalist belief that schools should not teach anything about Darwin’s theory of evolution may be respected as a sincere expression of one’s faith, but at the same time the plausibility of the content of this conviction may be challenged from a more secular perspective. What should be respected is the fact that a certain religious view is a deeply personal matter. It matters highly for the person in question. This is a seriousness people from different ethnical groups may identify with, even though they formulate their life views in different ways. This way of constructing a common basis for different ethnic and religious groups might, of course, be challenged in a highly secular society where many persons do not tend to take life views seriously at all. It could also be questioned by the groups who do not take seriously the moral importance of “universalizing one’s ethical rules”, i.e. that the rule applies to me (or my group) because of certain characteristics, it also applies to you (and your group) if you share the same kind of features. If the sincerity of my religious belief should be taken seriously, why should not yours be taken seriously if it has the same psychological characteristics?

Apart from the belief of the importance of having a more or less secure culture and the value of taking certain deeply engrained feelings seriously, the participants in the public dialogue about multicultural society will find that their reasons reflect the maintenance of certain public goods such as national defence, a certain political climate, clean air, etc. Public goods could be defined as those which serve the interests of people in a conflict-free, non-exclusive and non-excludable way. A public good is non-exclusive in the sense that one person’s enjoyment that good does not diminish the enjoyment of other persons. A common good is also non-excludable in the sense that when it is available in a society no citizen may be excluded from enjoying it. Many public
goods are public in the sense that they cannot exist without collective action. When people co-operate through activities that aim to provide collective or public goods this can, in itself, also create a sense of commonality.

The public dialogue comprises argumentation among different cultural groups with reference to what is regarded as valuable features of a common society. People may have different views about what is regarded as a public good and what is seen as a desirable feature of a society, but this is a lack of agreement that is not particular to a multicultural society. Different interpretations of the concept of a public good exist in Western liberal traditions as well as different interpretations of the public sphere (see below). Of course, the value of commonality may be challenged. Why should we strive for a sense of commonality? This is an extremely individualist query. However, when different ethnic groups stress the importance of commonality, this is often described in terms of shared commitments and responsibilities. The shared commitments are expressed through the maintenance of public goods and a sense of solidarity with the fellow members of the group. The task of finding a common political framework might come from, for example, a will to formulate common institutions of law. One could then ask why a group should reject the possibility of a wider commonality that includes other ethnic and religious groups if the groups find out that they have common concerns. Often it may be reasonable to differentiate between common, public concerns and more private (cultural-specific) concerns in a more fine grained manner than is usually done in public debate. Making room for cultural distinctiveness in various spheres of society such as education may also require new and progressive thoughts concerning the content of the state curriculum and its institutional implementation. What kind of independent schools are reasonable and what kind of cultural-specific education could be possible within the framework of the common school system?
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Figure 122. Seal hunters, a detail of *Carta marina* by Olaus Magnus, published 1539 in Venedig. Ill.: Uppsala University Library