CREATING AN ETHNIC PEACE

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*T*HE LARGEST CHALLENGE for post-conflict societies which have been torn apart by ethnically motivated or justified violence is the creation of viable states and recreating social interaction. Anthony Oberschall in his article on ethnic cooperation and separation discusses these difficulties. He appears to be cautiously optimistic by arguing that although ethnic cooperation can be quickly destroying during war, it will grow back, albeit slowly, during peace time. At first, this might not appear all too encouraging, but the assumption that peace brings about a growth of cross-ethnic cooperation appears more optimistic than his empirical evidence suggests. In Miercurea Ciuc, according to Oberschall, the ethnic unmixing occurred without ethnic conflict. Similarly, segregation in Northern Ireland has to some degree increased, or at least not decreased, after the signing of the Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998.[1] Similarly, reports about increased ethnic segregation in Macedonia since the Ohrid Framework Agreement suggest that peace does not necessarily lead to an increase in ethnic cooperation.[2]

Anthony Oberschall argues accordingly that there are two forms of ethnic peace, one based on segregation and one based on cooperation. These two types should not be understood as a dichotomy from which one can be chosen by peacemakers. Division and segregation might already be in place after the conflict or might be part of the political dynamics. Thus, cooperation has to compete and coexist in with segregation. Cooperation is often about taking other lines of social and political tension seriously and reducing lines of division which would reinforce existing ethnic lines of division, as discussed in the case of religion by Oberschall. A key weakness of the peace-process in Bosnia (and elsewhere) has been the self-limitation of the international actors in undoing the segregation of the war, rather than creating new bridges between communities. Although I do not share the optimism of Oberschall regarding the integrative function of sport in Bosnia, especially considering the commitment of most Bosnian Serb fans to the Serbian team,[3] the integration of Bosnian football, at least institutionally, has been success story. There have been few efforts to create new forms of cooperation and communication, such as supporting the mobility across the entity boundary line (i.e. locating state institutions outside Sarajevo). The focus on undoing war-time segregation characterizes many other peace plans, successful or failed (i.e. Annan plan for Cyprus) and neglects new forms of cooperation. Furthermore, peace plans often neglect the stuff which defines the nature of interethnic relations in the future, in particular education. In Bosnia, education

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[1] Neil Jarman, "No Longer a Problem? Sectarian Violence in Northern Ireland," Institute for Conflict Research, June 2005.

[2] See my chapter "Partial Implementation, Partial Success: The Case of Macedonia," in Ian O'Flynn & David Russell (eds.), *New Challenges to Powersharing. Institutional and Social Reform in Divided Societies* (London: Pluto, 2005).

[3] Ed Vulliamy, "Welcome to Sarajevo", *The Observer*, 1.7.2007.

was left out during the negotiations in Dayton, and only years later did the OSCE become active in promoting some basic cooperation. Oberschall is right in singling out this form of segregation. The "Two schools under one roof" scheme which covers some 50 schools in the Federation of Bosnia is a particularly stark form of segregation, where Bosniak and Croat school pupils use different shifts and curricula and only share the building (often not even the rooms or floors). While some forms of 'subversive' contacts have emerged in these schools over time, the segregation has created a generation which has less experience of cross-ethnic communication that those who are old enough to have received their education in Yugoslavia. It is thus significant that post-conflict and nationalist educational system often contribute more to segregation than any other aspect of society.

Institutional Responses

As Oberschall correctly notes, ethnic relations after a conflict are usually quiet different than before.[4] Whereas the relevance of ethnic belonging might be marginal before and other political and socially relevant identities might have been competing (and even persevering) with ethnicity, after conflict ethnicity is often the prevalent form of political identity and characterized by fear and segregation. The fundamental challenge is the institutional response to this reality. While liberal scholars might be tempted to wish for a political system which is free of ethnicity and promotes individual rights, such a political system is often neither realistic nor desirable, as it might allow majorities to dominate and does not succeed in alleviating collectively mobilized fears. In his article, Oberschall distinguishes between incentive-based institutions and consociational systems, a distinction that reflects conventional wisdom on institutional responses to divided societies.[5] Here, he argues that incentive-based systems take a critical view of ethnicity and elites, while "Consociationalism institutionalizes and legitimizes ethnicity…and considers it desirable and benign." While I share the concerns over the institutionalization of ethnicity, most scholars who support consociational approaches would not see ethnicity as benign or even desirable. Instead, ethnicity is a fact in post-conflict settings and divided societies more broadly. Thus, any institutional system needs to acknowledge this factor. As a result, I would agree with Brendan O'Leary's assessment that consociationalists neither subscribe to a primordial understanding of, nor have an inherent preference for ethnic identity. Instead, the consociational approach assumes that ethnic identity, once mobilized is political relevant and its political salience is unlikely to decline rapidly.[6] The problem of incentive-based systems which actively promote cooperation is two-fold. Firstly, they run the risk of favoring the majority and consolidating the exclusion of smaller minorities. Secondly, ethnic elites are unlikely to agree to

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[4] On this also see my review of Anthony Oberschall, *Conflict and Peace Building in Divided Societies. Responses to Ethnic Violence* (London: Routledge 2007), in *Nationalities Papers*, 2008, forthcoming.

[5] See Timothy Sisk, *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts.* Washington: USIP Press, 1996.

[6] Brendan O'Leary, "Debating Consociational Politics. Normative and Explanatory Arguments." Pp 3-43 in Sid Noel (ed.), *From Power Sharing to Democracy. Post-conflict Institutions in Ethnically Divided Societies.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill University Press, 2005.

undo the basis of their power. Thus, incentive based systems can only be successful if imposed from outside. This drastically reduces the opportunities for such systems and has made them rare around the world.

The institutional choice is thus largely not between consociational and incentive based systems, but rather over what kind of institutionalization of ethnicity is required and how such a system can acquire incentive-based elements over time. The example of Bosnia and Herzegovina clearly demonstrates that not any system which contains consociational features is adequate and the devil of a successful consociational arrangement lies in the institutional details. What appears to be a weakness of consociationalism is in fact a problem of the basic social consensus over the institutional set-up. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the veto rights and other ethnic representation is not at the roof of the difficult post-conflict reconstruction, but rather the lack of a foundational consensus over the state. Vetoes and ethnic quotas become a tool to sabotage the other's institutions as they are not accepted by all parties. As the case of Northern Ireland highlights, consociational governance can work, as long as the agreement is accept by all main parties and no lingering issues prevent parties from investing into these institutions.

Altogether, there is no easy answer on how to overcome the dominance and destructive power of ethnic identity after conflict. Clearly, ethnic belonging cannot be switched off with the recent memories of violence, elites which benefit from the issue and factual segregation. The key is a process which first takes out the fear factor from ethnic politics which empty identity from any meaning besides the fear of domination by others. Only when this occurs can ethnic belonging be a form of political identity which can coexist with other political ideas and open space for those who do not want to belong to an ethnic group or for whom belonging is not relevant.

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