Ethnic boundaries and minorities

Lia Melikishvili and Natia Jalabadze

(Tbilisi)

Language and Ethnic Boundaries
in Multiethnic Georgia

Abstract: Der Artikel untersucht die Frage der ethnischen Grenzen im multiethnischen Georgien. Ethnische Grenzen werden hier nicht als territoriale Grenzen verstanden, sondern als subjektiv konzipierte und wahrnehmbare Distanz, welche im Rahmen interethnischer Beziehungen untersucht wird. Sprache als Marker ethnischer Differenz spielt häufig eine wichtige Rolle in Grenzziehungsprozessen. Im Rahmen der georgischen Lebenswirklichkeiten argumentieren wir dafür, Sprache auf zweierlei Arten zu verstehen: einmal als ein Mittel in ethnischen Grenzziehungen und andererseits als ein Medium zwischen diesen Grenzen, welches die Differenzen zwischen ethnischen Gruppen überbrücken kann. Wir zeigen, wie Sprache als Marker ethnischer Differenz für den Erhalt ethnischer Grenzen eingesetzt werden kann.

Schlagworte: Sprache als Marker ethnischer Differenz, multiethnische Gesellschaft, ethnische Grenze

Key words: language, multiethnic society, ethnic boundary, boundary maintenance, ethnic marker issue

Georgia is famous for its multiethnic and multicultural composition. Since ancient times, representatives of various nationalities settled in the country. Azeri, Armenians, Greeks, Germans, Jews, Kurds, Ossetians, Russians, etc., lived in this area for centuries, mostly in densely populated enclaves, and sometimes in mixed settlements. In different historical times, the ethnic composition of Georgia changed permanently due to inflows and outflows of various ethnic groups. However, the non-Georgian population (nowadays regarded as ethnic minorities), residing in the area, preserved their ethnic identities, their group's names and self-awareness, their native languages (in many cases), traditional cultures, religions, etc. Through the centuries, the Georgian people have worked out a strategy of peaceful coexistence with different ethnic groups, which implied development of interethnic contacts and interdependence, on the one hand, and maintenance of ethnic boundaries on the other.

J. Chardin, who travelled in Georgia in the second half of the 17th century and visited Tbilisi, commented on Georgia's population:

"Their manners and customs are a mixture of those of the most of the nations that sur-
round them. This I believe proceeds from the commerce they carry on with many differ-
ent countries and from the liberty everyone enjoys in Georgia, of living according to his
own religion and customs and of freely defending them. Here you see Armenians, Greeks,
Turks, Persians, Indians, Tartars and Moscovites..." (Chardin 1815, p. 375).

This short passage outlines multiethnic Georgian society with its existing ethnic
boundaries, which, in the words of Barth, "persist despite a flow of personnel
across them" (Barth 1969, p. 10).

In this article, we focus on the problem of ethnic boundaries in multiethnic Geor-
gia and the role of language in ethnic boundary-making; regarding the situation in
Georgia, we demonstrate how language, as one of the markers of ethnic distinction,
could act as a means of maintaining ethnic boundaries.

The issue of ethnic boundaries is a relevant and current problem in multiethnic
societies. Ethnic boundaries are generally perceived not as a territorial border, but
as a subjectively conceived and perceptible distance, which is considered in the con-
text of interethnic relations. It is a mental product determined by an ethnic group.
It serves as a special methodological category in the study of ethnicity and ethnic
identity. As noted by Barth, boundaries maintain and generate ethnic diversity within
larger, encompassing social systems (Barth 1969, p. 18). According to his assumption,
"categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and
information, and stable, persisting, and often vitally important social relations are
maintained across such boundaries " (op. cit, p. 10). Ethnic boundaries imply cul-
tural and social distance. Cultural distance grows in accordance with social distance.
Boundaries may change depending on political and economic conditions, various
spheres of social interaction and relationships (Tishkov 1997, pp. 35–38). Markers,
the most significant features of a group, operate as boundary-forming and boundary-
maintenance concepts. However, not only specific cultural symbols can appear as
markers, but also political orientations and values. Language as a marker of ethnic
distinction often plays an important role in the process of boundary maintenance.

The problem of communication always occurs in multiethnic regions. It becomes
especially problematic in those areas where virtual ethnic boundaries are reinforced
by physical isolation of one ethnic group from another. Such situations promote the
stability of cultural markers of ethnic identity. For example, in Georgia's southern
regions (Kvemo Kartli, Javakheti), ethnic minorities live mainly in compact iso-
lated settlements, preserving their cultural identity and, even more significantly,
their native language. Here, language acts as a representation of ethnic identity and
ethnic self-awareness.

Generally, language as a social phenomenon could stipulate life without conflicts
and peaceful cohabitation of the society. However, it has not always been so in Geor-

gia, especially during the post-Soviet period, when the language problem in relation to the issue of ethnic boundaries became especially acute.

During the Soviet period, communication between people from different cultural backgrounds generally took place in the Russian language. Russian was the *lingua franca* among the peoples of the Soviet Union, and that very status was supported by the educational system at that time. "Accordingly, during the Soviet period in Georgia in the areas populated by minorities, the Russian language was also used as a *lingua franca*." (Melikishvili 2011, pp. 201–203). In the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, knowledge of the Georgian language was not a priority for the national minorities, as Russian served as the unifying tongue in majority-minority relations. "General primary and secondary education was available in minority languages, and while higher education was available in Georgian, which was also the official state language in the republic at that time, numerous Russian-language sectors functioned at all higher education institutions of the Georgian SSR" (Mekhuzla/Roche 2009, pp. 5–6).

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Georgia declared independence in 1991 and in 1995 Georgian as a state language (since 1995 by the Constitution of Georgia Abkhazian is a State language of Abkhazia besides Georgian). Restructuring the system on national rails caused serious problems *vis-à-vis* intercultural communication. By that time, a very small number of the non-Georgian population (residing mainly in compact settlements in the border regions) could speak Georgian; hence, Georgian was unable to function as a common language. Declaration of Georgian as an official language implied its mandatory knowledge primarily by those persons whose work was connected with governmental organizations, various official institutions and medical, educational or other services. Prior to that time, the knowledge of Russian gave additional opportunities for social success to representatives of non-dominant nations, but in post-Soviet times, a lack of command of the Georgian language hampered one's career.

Ethnic minorities who lived isolated in compact settlements in border regions (generally Azeris, Armenians and Greeks) regarded speaking Georgian as coercion. They began to fear being discriminated based upon their ethnic languages, and generally feared oppression and assimilation by Georgians. The language barrier developed into a problem, which was related to the hardships of post-Soviet crisis regarding unemployment, lack of social inclusion, problems of education, etc. This caused common desinterest and frustration among the minorities, and triggered their desire to migrate. The situation resulted in social tensions among them. The Georgian reality has demonstrated that during national revival, a language can obtain the significance of a fundamental ethnic value, and become a means of manipulation of not only cultural, but also political interests. Ethnic clashes occurred here and there, and thou-

sands of non-Georgians emigrated from Georgia. According to statistical data, nearly half of the ethnic minority population migrated from Georgia in the 1990s. (From urban settlements, the flow of immigrants was directed mainly toward Western Europe and the United States, from the rural settlements mostly to the Russian Federation (Danelia et.al. 2011, p. 8). For example, from Kvemo Kartli region, Azeris migrated mostly to Azerbaijan, Armenians to Armenia and Greeks to Greece, migration flows were directed to other countries, but mainly to Russia (Jalabadze 2011, p. 178).

Those who remained became detached within their communicative space, within their ethnic boundaries; they were separated from the public life of the country, were less involved, and to a certain extent were excluded from the political and social life of the state. In the decades leading up to the "Rose Revolution", the issue caused marginalization of ethnic minorities – they became isolated, relationships between the groups grew tense, and participation in public service were restricted.

As argued by Wheatley, given the weak infrastructural power of the state in the early years of independence (the period of Shevardnadze), it was not possible to promote knowledge of Georgian amongst members of national minorities. Hence, in compact isolated settlements of minorities, knowledge of Georgian remained very poor. As Russian began to lose its role as the language of inter-ethnic communication, the language barrier became increasingly worse between Georgian and minority groups, especially amongst young people. The youth could no longer speak Russian fluently enough to communicate, and programs to teach Georgian to ethnic minorities were half-hearted, mainly due to the state's incapacity to implement its educational policy (Wheatley 2009, p. 14).

After Georgia's Independence, especially since the "Rose Revolution", Russian schools were gradually abolished and transformed into Georgian ones. Very few of them still function in Tbilisi and the State's multiethnic regions. The Russian language teaching hours in secondary schools have been consistently decreasing, and are now minimized (http://saqinform.ge). Russian language media – TV channels and press based in Georgia have been actually decreased to minimum (Akerlund 2012).

For a long period, no program of the universal teaching of Georgian as a *lingua franca* was instituted. Therefore, until today, the majority of non-Georgians in multiethnic regions are unable to speak Georgian, which prevents successful cross-cultural communication between the Georgian and non-Georgian groups. Those of the elder generations do understand each other because they still use Russian for communication, but children of the younger generation are more alienated.

Due to the lack of command of the Georgian language, compactly settled ethnic minorities are in an informational vacuum. They cannot read the Georgian press and do not watch Georgian TV channels, they are unable to apply to the court or

the police independently, and very rarely do they continue their studies in advanced Georgian schools, etc. Therefore, they do not understand current or national events. All of the above factors naturally lead to their increasing isolation. The population of mainly isolated monoethnic settlements are oriented towards the neighboring countries – Armenians to Armenia and Azeris to Azerbaijan. One obvious symbol of this outward orientation that immediately catches the eye of a visitor is the mounting of satellite dishes on houses, installed aiming directly toward the neighboring states. Apart from the fact that the ethnic minorities watch foreign TV channels (Azeri, Armenian, Turkish), they identify themselves with a neighboring country, which is linked with the perception of an ethnic, rather than a political border. Irredentist aspirations orient Azeri towards Azerbaijan, Armenians towards Armenia; they link their identity with another state rather than with Georgia. This orientation is not at all desirable for Georgia, and may lead to problems in future.

Under the conditions of independent Georgia following the "Rose Revolution" (2003), the situation has changed and the new strategy of universal teaching of the Georgian language in multiethnic regions has been emphasized. Soon after the revolution, the ministry of education and science of Georgia, in cooperation with international and local experts, issued a special document aiming to create a solid political and legislative basis for the implementation of special programs of Georgian language teaching to the minorities living in multi-ethnic regions. Recently, the State has focused on the problem of harmonization of the education system in order to facilitate verbal communication between different groups (Melikishvili et al. 2011, p. 444).

However, though some progress has been made regarding intercultural communication, the lack of Georgian speaking skills among the population remains a core problem. Among the region's non-Georgian population, mainly minorities living in the capital and multiethnic settlements speak Georgian fluently, while knowledge of the official language is generally very poor in isolated mono-ethnic areas. Fieldwork revealed different situations in different regions regarding Georgian language skills. In the villages inhabited by the representatives of a single non-dominant ethnic group, the knowledge of Georgian is very poor, and in some cases there is no command of the language at all. However, men display better Georgian competence in comparison with women (Jalabadze 2011, p. 205). This applies to all minority groups – Azeris, Armenians, Greeks and others. The situation regarding Georgian language skills is slightly better among women working in regional centres and in the capital, mainly at the markets; this is primarily due to their everyday interactions with Georgians. Generally, they manage to communicate, though their vocabulary is very limited.

In some mono-ethnic settlements, there are Armenian or Azerbaijani schools. In Azerbaijanian and Armenian schools, the Georgian language is also taught. However,

some places do not have a Georgian language teacher, and if they do, these teachers are often less qualified local staff (Field materials, Kvemo Kartli, 2009).

The language barrier in mono-ethnic settlements in Georgia exists not only because of the lack of Georgian language skills, but because minority groups do not know each other's languages; that is to say, Azeris don't understand Armenians and vice versa, Armenian – Greek, etc. However, in contrast to the isolated compact settlements, the situation is variable in ethnically mixed areas. In the latter, the population understands one another's language and manages to communicate with one another, especially the younger generation, whose contacts are more intensive. For example, there are two villages of Bolnisi in the Bolnisi municipality (Kvemo Kartli region, southern Georgia) located side by side. One is populated by Azeris, and the other by Armenians. According to the information of the locals, the young generation of both villages can speak (though not actively) each other's languages because they have contact in the fields of sports and entertainment. But such situations are comparatively rare.

Aside from the above, it is worth mentioning that the ethnic barriers in the aforementioned societies are strictly limited. It is apparent that, among other reasons, such limits prevent minority groups from integrating into society, which is one of the fundamental prerequisites for the establishment of a civil society. Despite this, from the interviews with our informants it becomes obvious that the Georgian population desires integration of ethnic minorities into the social and political life of the state, and encourages them to study Georgian. According to one of our Georgian respondents: "Azeri and Armenian should learn Georgian because they live here, and they should know the language of the state of which they are citizens. Otherwise, how could they live here?" (Field Materials, Tsalka, 2008) The Georgian population expresses discontent that ethnic minorities do not speak the official language and have no idea about current issues in the country. The following Georgian respondent remarks about their Azeri neighbors:

> "They live in Georgia with the life of Azerbaijan. In our village, all Georgians could speak Azeri language but none of the Azeri knows our language. They do not understand the Georgian language and cannot respond. If we learned their language, why don't they do the same? We think that ethnic minorities consider speaking Georgian as something imposed upon them" (Field materials, Dmanisi, 2009).

The fear among ethnic minorities of the violation of "their boundaries" through the imposition of the Georgian language has gradually declined. In the most recent period, ethnic minorities have realized that the lack of knowledge of the state language deprives their children of social and political well-being. Hence, they are more motivated to study Georgian. A young man from an Azeri village remarks:

"If our people want their children to have a successful future and do not run away from here, they should teach them Georgian. They need to put all the effort in that! Generally, Azeris here have very poor Georgian language skills, because they do not have contact with Georgians. Practice is needed! Only 3 % of the Azeri population could understand Georgian. Therefore, they are mainly engaged in agriculture. If they had a command of Georgian, then why would they go to another country? It makes sense to stay here when you know the State language. Then, we also could find a job as the Georgians do. Georgians work here and we run away either to Baku or to Russia. We have good income there, but we are far from our home. It is better to have 5 Rubles here than 20 in abroad. There you see a little boy– he does not know Georgian, therefore he is unable to get higher education here; he has to go to Azerbaijan. 2000 dollars are needed for his preparation for the exams, and then the exams…?! Those who study in Azerbaijan, will never come back to stay here. Hence, our villages, houses are deserted.

The Georgian Language is taught at non-Georgian schools here, but 5 hours a week is not enough. Everywhere in Europe, in America, everywhere one has to know the language of the country where one lives. Now, all Azeri in Bolnisi, all of us – the young and the adults want to learn the language of the country where we live" (Field materials, Kvemo Kartli, 2010).

Proceeding from the above, teaching the state language to the non-Georgian speaking population is the most important objective for the country's development.

Ethnic boundaries that imply cultural and social distance sometimes do not coincide with political borders of a country; sometimes, ethnic groups with unified identity exist on either sides of a border between two states. This situation is typical for the post-Soviet countries, and especially for Georgia, where the peripheral territories are populated by non-dominant ethnic groups; due to historical conditions, most of these groups have similar ethnic identities to the neighboring states, though they did not come to Georgia from these countries. For example, Armenians of Javakheti resettled not from neighboring Armenia, but from Turkey, while the majority of Azeris migrated from Persia and not from Azerbaijan. The ethnic boundary in the perception of these groups does not coincide with the political one. In this case, the factor of common language and similar culture has played a significant role in triggering irredentist aspirations among these groups. However, such a situation becomes dangerous for the security of a state, especially when ethnic tension occurs.

The self-awereness of the Armenians – residing in Javakheti (South Georgia) near the Georgian-Armenian border – towards this problem is unique. They consider their motherland the region in Georgia, where Armenians live – all Armenian villages, including the regional centre Akhalkalaki. According to their opinion, this area belongs to Armenia. Although they apparently know that they live in Georgia and seem to acknowledge geographic borders, the perception of the motherland

in their mentality is still entirely different. In interviews they state that the area of their homes is not Georgia, but Armenia. They used to say:

"You see, this is like that in your country – Georgia, but here in Armenia – it is like this." For them, "Your country, Georgia" is the area where Georgians dwell – the territory beyond Akhalkalaki, or sometimes beyond Akhaltsikhe (also with a solid number of Armenians) – while "here in Armenia" is associated with the ethnic boundary and the territory populated by Armenians. This is correspondingly perceived to be the land of Armenia.

The attitude of the Armenian population towards this issue became clear during an interesting meeting with an Armenian woman. When visiting one of the Armenia villages, she almost blocked our way and insisted that we should visit her family – there was no option. We agreed, and she welcomed us with great hospitality. In the end, she finally explained the motives of her behavior. The woman told us:

"I was born and brought up in Georgia, Batumi and then I got married in Armenia. When I saw you, I guessed you were Georgians and I was so happy! My heart fluttered and I decided to invite you to my place by all means."

When we asked her where exactly she was married in Armenia, her answer was– "here in this village". We were confused and tried to find out whether she really considered the village to be in Armenia. The woman naively confirmed it without any pretext. The same disposition was present among almost all of our informants.

Myths and tales about the historical location of Armenia are purposefully communicated to the population. In some Armenian families, one will find books describing the origin of Armenia, its lands and owners. The idea of the motherland in the mentality of Armenians is enhanced by covert, and later (after Perestroika) overt anti-Georgian political processes in the region, including but not limited to the promotion of the idea of seceding from Georgia, establishing the region as an independent political unit through a referendum, and later becoming a part of Armenia. The terrorist act against the checkpoint at the Armenian-Georgian border was one outcome of this process. The checkpoint was exploded first in 1990 and then in 1991 due to the assumption that customs controls should not exist in that area at all.

The perception of Javakheti as "the motherland of Armenians" is linked with the fact that many Armenians from the region went to protect "their own land" during the Karabach armed conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia.[1] Those who returned proudly established themselves as patriots fighting for their homeland, and were pro-

---

1   The conflict took place in the late 1980s to May 1994, in the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in southwestern Azerbaijan. At present Armenians fully control most of the enclave and approximately 9 % of Azerbaijan's territory outside the enclave.

moted to the best positions by local authorities. It is also interesting that many citizens of Armenia who are closely connected with Akhaltsikhe- Akhalkalaki or villages of Javakheti (blood relations, education, and trade) have the same perception – they simply claim that the territory belongs to Armenia.

The aforementioned facts promote the perception of Javakheti as the homeland of Armenians. In the mentality of Armenians living in Javakheti, the conception of the homeland consists of two grades. First, their homeland is the micro-territory where they reside (specifically Javakheti); and secondly, it is Armenia with its currently existing borders.

Despite the fact that attempts are made to promote the idea of "Great Armenia" via the distribution of false maps, an ordinary Armenian farmer still cannot comprehend it. For a local Armenian farmer, the border of his homeland reaches neither Tbilisi, nor Kutaisi, nor the historical region in modern Turkey (though many of them know that they were displaced from Turkey). In the Armenians' mentality, the homeland is the territory where they act – more precisely, where they are entitled to act. The area of intensive activities for the Armenian population in Javakheti has always been, and remains the former Soviet Union (mostly Russia). However, the Armenians have never identified Russia as their homeland. The homeland for them is the place where they were born and where they act; the homeland is the territory settled by Armenians, where they speak Armenian, and it does not matter at all where the politically or historically delineated border lies. The ethnic boundary in their perception is their homeland, which for them is the same as Armenia, and where they speak the same language. In their perception, they thus identify themselves with the population of a different country.

The language as one of the markers of identity could be regarded as the most effective and influential factors in similar situations. However, if on the one hand language as we have shown above acts as a primary marker for ethnic boundary formation, on the other hand it does not operate as a marker of ethnic distinction. This can be observed in case of the Greek population in the Tsalka district (Kvemo Kartli region). Part of the Greek population in Georgia speaks Pontic Greek, and the other part Turkic, an Anatolian dialect of Turkish. The Turkic-speaking group (Urums) would never associate themselves with Turks, despite the similarity of their spoken languages. Both of these groups have Greek ethnic identity; the difference between their languages does not affect their ethnic affiliation. However, the position of outgroups is different. Some Georgians, for example, call them Tatars as their speech is Turkic. Apparently, the outgroup associates language with ethnicity – "if they speak Turkish, they are Turks".

A similar situation can be observed with the Ajarians, who are Muslim Georgians who speak Georgian. Because of ecological catastrophes in Achara, the affected population migrated to Kvemo Kartli. Hence, they became part of the multiethnic society in the region. Due to their religious orientation, Ajarians are also regarded as Tatars by out-groups; language in this case does not matter at all. In the mental representation of the majority of Georgians, religious affiliation is closely linked to ethnic identity. The Christian faith was equated with Georgian, and Muslim with Tatar (or ethnic groups of Turkic identity). Often, Christian was used as a synonym to Georgian, and if someone was Muslim he was considered to be Tatar. In this society, where such representations are still vital, the notion of Muslim Georgian is difficult to accept. For that reason, Greeks in the Tsalka region do not recognize Adjarians as Georgians; they use to say: "They simply speak Georgian! They only know Georgian, but they are not Georgians"(Field Materials,Tsalka, 2008).

A similar opinion can be heard in an interview with a Greek woman from an ethnically mixed village in South Georgia:

> "I tell Ajarians, I respect you because you speak Georgian, but why did you change your faith and convert to Islam? If you are Georgians, you should have nothing to do with Turkey – I said. And do you know, what they answered? If Turkey attacks us, they will kill you, and not us! Hum, they are real bastards! Then why do they live in our Georgia? Go and live in Turkey then!" (Field materials, Tsalka, 2008).

Concerning the role of language in ethnic boundary maintenance, the situation among Georgian Jews is different. Jews have had a presence in Georgia as far back as the 6th century BC. For Georgian Jews, Georgia became their motherland and the Georgian language their native language. They even developed a Judeo-Georgian dialect – Qivruli, which includes a number of Hebrew words. Georgian is the family language for the Georgian Jews living in Azerbaijan today. It remains the same among emigrated Georgian Jews in Israel even up to now (Moskovich/Ben-Oren 1982, pp. 19–24, Bekker 2014). Obviously, this fact is a perfect example of integration. However, sharing language had no impact upon their boundary-making process. Among the factors that had crucial importance in preserving Jewish identity in Georgia is primarily their religion and traditions.

Another group with Georgian ethnic identity is the Tsova-Tushs, who – aside from Georgian – speak Tsova-Tush or the Batsbi language, which belongs to the so-called Nakh subfamily of the Northeast Caucasian stock, and exists only as a spoken language. Batsbi people use Georgian as their written language. Despite the historical narrative that ascribes the appearance of this group to the Veinakh tribes, part of which were resettled by King Saurmag in the 3rd cent. BC. in Georgia's Eastern

mountainous region, their ethnic identity is Georgian. Their choice of belonging to Georgia is not based on their spoken language.

The role of language in boundary-forming and boundary maintenance processes can be viewed in two ways: first, as a means of construction of ethnic boundaries, and second, as a medium between these boundaries that bridges the gaps between ethnic groups.

The above examples of the Georgian situation demonstrate these different roles of language in multiethnic societies. In its first function, language either operates as the primary marker of ethnic identity maintenance, such as in the case of Armenian and Azerbaijani groups, or it is absolutely irrelevant in this process, as in the cases of the Jews, Greeks and Batsbi. As a medium between ethnic boundaries, language acquires additional traits of one of the main actors in the processes of integration.

Today, integration of minorities into Georgian society is one of the core problems of the nation's policy. It strives toward effective intercultural communication, which is achieved via verbal contact between the groups. Lack of Georgian language skills, which had previously caused disruption of communication between the groups, is gradually being reduced. Instrumental motivation for the study of the state language is observed among all ethnic groups in isolated compact settlements. This situation will promote movement of different groups across ethnic boundaries, and promote peaceful coexistence of various ethnic groups with their different cultures and religious faiths.

Literature:

Akerlund, Tobias: *Media Situation in Georgia*. Ecmi Working Paper #52, 2012, retrieved 18.03.2015, from http://www.ecmicaucasus.org/upload/publications/working_paper_52_en.pdf

Barth, Frederick: *Ethnic groups and boundaries*. Little, Brown and Company: Boston 1969.

Bekker, Moisey: „Judaism in the Caucasus". Paper presented at the Conference "Religions in the Caucasus", London 3–4 March 2014.

Danelia, Akaki et.al.: *Social protection and Social inclusion in Georgia, Executive Summary*. The Institute of Social Studies and Analysis (ISSA), European Union 2011, www.issa-georgia.com

Chardin, John: "The travels of Sir John Chardin through Mingrelia and Georgia into Persia". In: *Voyages and travels selected from the Writers of all Nations*. voll.VII. J. Christie: Dublin 1815, pp. 321–426.

Jalabadze, Natia: "Specificities of Acculturation in polyethnic Society". In: Melikishvili, Liana et.al. (eds.): *Ethnic aspects of social security in polyethnic society*. Mstignobari: Tbilisi 2011, pp. 138–234.

Mekhuzla, Salome / Roche, Aideen: *National Minorities and Educational Reform In Georgia.* ECMI Working Paper # 46 2009, retrieved 18.03.2015, from http://www.ecmi.de

Melikishvili, Liana et. al.: *Ethnic aspects of social security in polyethnic society*. Mstignobari: Tbilisi 2011.

Moskovich, Wolf / Ben-Oren, Gershon: "The Hebrew-Aramaic and Georgian Components in the Spoken Language of Georgian Jews". In: *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies. Held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem*, 16–21 August 1981: Division D, 19–24. Jerusalem 1982.

Tishkov, Valery A.: "Identity and cultural boundaries". In: Olcott M.B/ Tishkov, V.A (eds.): *Identity and Conflict in Post-Soviet States*. Moscow Carnegie Center: Moscow 1997, pp. 15 – 43.

Wheatley, Jonathan: *The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli provinces of Georgia, Five Years into the Presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili*. ECMI working paper 44, 2009, retrieved 18.03.2015, from http://www.ecmi.de.

Corpora:

Field materials, Dmanisi, 2009

Field material, Kvemo Kartli 2009 + 2010

Field material, Tsalka, 2008.

Maria Klessmann

(Frankfurt/Oder)

Roma school mediation in Germany – Its Effects and Limitations

Abstract: Im Rahmen der von der EU erklärten „Dekade der Roma-Integration", wurde im Jahr 2011 das Roma-Schulmediatoren-Programm ROMED ins Leben gerufen. Der vorliegende Artikel möchte hierzu Hintergrundinformationen zu der Umsetzung des Programms in Deutschland, dessen Wirkungsweisen und Grenzen aufzeigen und die – teils nicht eindeutige – Rolle der Mediatoren/innen näher in den Blick nehmen. Es gilt also zu fragen, warum es ein auf eine ethnische Minderheit zugeschnittenes Programm dieser Art gibt? Inwieweit es sich dabei um (klassische) Mediation handelt? Und welche diskursiven Rollenzuschreibungen sich welchen Selbstpositionierungen in den (Mediations-)Gesprächen gegenüber sehen? Diese Annäherung erfolgt einerseits anhand gesammelter Aussagen von Verantwortlichen, die mit und in dem Programm arbeiten, und andererseits entlang kurzer Ausschnitte aus dem bisher gesammelten empirischen Material für eine größere Studie, die interessante und auffällige Phänomene für das Thema dieses Artikels enthalten.

Schlagworte: (Roma-)Schulmediation, Minderheit, Ethnisierung, Rollenzuschreibungen, Selbstpositionierungen

Keywords: (Roma) School mediation, minority, ethnicization, role assignments, self-positionings

1 Preface

There is hardly any reliable data on the school situation of Roma children in Germany. The few existing studies show that Roma children suffer from experiences of discrimination in schools and struggle with high dropout rates, poor qualifications and irregular school attendance.[1] German politics concerning Roma focus on access to education, access to employment, as well as to healthcare and housing.[2] As Ger-

---

1   Like for example the study of Daniel Strauß „Studie zur aktuellen Bildungssituation deutscher Sinti und Roma. Dokumentation und Forschungsbericht" which has been published in 2011 and already in the preface criticizes that it is the first study on this subject since 30 years.

2   Bundesministerium des Innern (Ed.): *Report from the Federal Republic of Germany to the European Commission. An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 – Integrated packages of measures to promote the integration and participa-*

many does not compile any statistics about ethnicity, there are no reliable figures on how many Roma live in Germany, how the different origins are distributed among the Roma population in Germany, etc. For larger German cities such as Berlin, it is known that a majority of the Roma population is concentrated in districts which are among the poorest of those cities, but which „provide the informal accommodation structures for newcomers that are typical for such neighbourhoods.“[3]

Because in many countries Europe's largest minority is still facing above-average poverty and discrimination, the EU declared a „Decade of Roma Inclusion“, in which many new projects were established to improve the situation of Roma. It was within this context that the Roma school mediators programme (ROMED) was established in 2011. Even prior to that training and employment of Roma mediators or assistants had already started in the 1980s and 1990s at the initiative of NGOs in countries like Spain, France, Finland and Romania.[4]

Based on official documents of the programme ROMED, statements of involved officials, an expert interview with one of the initiators of the programme in Berlin, and empirical data collected for a broader study within German schools, this article provides a first look at the work of Roma school mediators in Germany, its effects and limitations, and discusses some critical points in the everyday situation in German schools.[5] Why is there a programme tailored to one single „ethnic group“? How does it work? What does it have to do with mediation? Is the heterogeneity of *the group* conceptualized in the programme, and if so, how does it influence the work of the mediators? Besides these guiding questions, different ideas towards mediation forming the everyday practice of the Roma school mediators is discussed, along with its ideas of the role of the mediators.

---

tion of Sinti and Roma in Germany. 2011, pp. 5–6, retrieved 30.11.2014, from http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_germany_strategy_en.pdf

3   Schmitt, Anna/Bytyci, Hamze/Heine, Wolfgang: EUROCITIES report: *The Berlin mobile contact point for EU migrant workers and Roma from the perspective of the service providers.* 2011, retrieved 30.11.2014, from http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES%20report%20-%20Contact%20point%20for%20Roma%20in%20Berlin.pdf

4   Rus, Calin: *The situation of Roma School Mediators and Assistants in Europe*, 2006, p. 8, retrieved 30.11.2014, from http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/Mediators_Analyse_EN.PDF

5   This article is part of the PhD-project „Negotiating membership in Roma school mediation“ which is condcuted at the graduate school „Perceiving and negotiating borders in conversations“ at the Viadrina Center „B/ORDERS IN MOTION“, Frankfurt (Oder).

2. Roma school mediation in Germany

School mediation is a so-called academic method of conflict settlement, and was implemented in the early 1990s in Germany. Today, almost all German Federal States work with school mediations, at least as a pilot project.[6] Peer mediation, where students are trained as mediators, but also teachers and sometimes even parents and principals can take part in training courses, is currently the most common form of school mediation in German schools.[7] Whereas the mediation we talk about here is characterized by the use of a third party which in most cases until then did not belong to the school system.

One of the main ideas of school mediation through the use of third parties or peer mediation is, that it should ideally ease the burden on teachers, as they no longer have to constantly appear as arbitrators.[8] But, if mediation is successfully implemented in schools, this may also strengthen social skills, such as empathy, team work and communication. If the students learn to resolve conflicts by themselves, this may contribute to an increased self-esteem, as the children and young people no longer appear only as „problem-causers“, but also as „problem-solvers“.[9]„Successful mediation shifts competences, creates a feeling of responsibility among pupils, reduces the power differential between teachers and students and decreases the fear of conflicts and the perception of discrepancies.“[10] As Schubarth and Simsa put it, school mediation has the following advantages in comparison to traditional conflict resolutions: Common or traditional ways of solving conflicts usually seek a guilty party, and, in the end, produce winners and losers. In contrast, school mediation is characterized by equality, participation and the mutual consent of interests. Differing points of view and different interests are accepted.

The European Training Programme for Roma Mediators (ROMED) started in 2011 in 15 European countries, and expanded to be implemented in 2012 in

---

6   Cf.: Simsa, Christiane/Schubarth, Wilfried (Eds.): *Konfliktmanagement an Schulen – Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Schulmediation*, Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung: Frankfurt am Main 2001, p. 3.

7   A lot of literature concerning school mediation in Germany refers (also) to peer mediation as it is currently the most common form of school mediation in Germany.

8   Cf.: Simsa/Schubarth, p. 4.

9   Cf.: Simsa/Schubarth, p. 5.

10 Dittman, Jörg: „Zur Evaluation von Mediationsprojekten an Schulen“ In: Simsa, Christiane/ Schubarth, Wilfried (Eds.): *Konfliktmanagement an Schulen – Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Schulmediation*. Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung: Frankfurt am Main 2001, p. 68. (Translation M.K.).

20 countries. According to the latest official numbers, today about 1000 active mediators work in 22 European countries.[11] Currently, about 10 Roma school mediators are working in Berlin schools; throughout Germany, between 30 and 50 mediators work specifically for members of the Roma ethnic minority. Most European countries use the term „Roma Teaching Assistant"; only seven European countries including Germany use the term Roma school mediation, whereas in Hamburg, for example, the project participants are called „Bildungs-berater", which may be translated as „educational advisor." This indicates the wide range of ideas which are connected with this programme and concept of work. The training and deployment of Roma school mediators in Europe is mainly based on the following arguments: especially low educational achieve-ments of Roma in the European comparison, low participation in early child-hood education, higher dropout rates and over-representation in special schools or other forms of educational segregation.

Trained mediators are mainly people with a „Roma background", people of local Roma communities, or even non-Roma with very good knowledge of "Roma issues", the local communities and their languages. Why especially members of the same ethnic minority are designated as school mediators is justified by the fact that "[t]hey understand both the culture and way of life of Roma communities and the way mainstream society and local administrations operate – and they know how to communicate with both."[12] Part of the work of the Roma school mediators also includes very practical support in everyday life. For example, clarification of what the children need for school and where you can conveniently get school supplies. Another important aspect is the function as "door opener" and translator. Frequently, Roma mediators have better and faster access to the children's parents or families. It is also about monitoring and preparing home visits and interviews of teachers with parents. Roma mediators should aim to improve the attitudes of parents towards education, if necessary. This can, for example, mean improving the school attendance of children.

The programme has now been launched into the second phase. In Germany ROMED2 started at the beginning of 2015 and henceforth also coordinates so-called Community Action Groups. Thereby, the focus is not on the single media-tion, but on building networks and communication structures between members

---

11   ROMED: *About Romed,* 2014, retrieved 30.11.2014, from http://romed.coe-romact.org/

12   Kyuchukov, Hristo: Roma school mediators in Berlin. Commissioned by the RAA Berlin, Sponsored by the Freudenberg Foundation, 2011, retrieved 30.11.2014, from http://www.raa-berlin.de/Neu2011/PDFDatein/Kyuchukov,%20Roma%20School%20 Mediation%20evaluation%20report.pdf

of Roma communities and local authorities. These groups are being counselled and supported to spell out specific needs and projects which have been identified as important for their particular local groups. After elaborating the projects and ideas of the different members of the Action Groups, meetings with representatives of the city or district are arranged. This second phase is, therefore, also very problem-oriented and searching for a consensus concerning the realization of specific projects resulting from this process. In order to counter-act a possible imbalance of power when the local authorities are the decision makers, the Community Action Groups prepare themselves thoroughly and provide practical approaches to local problems which have been identified within the group.

3. Why ethnicized mediation?

> The term ‚Roma' is an umbrella term for a multitude of groups of people with similar cultural characteristics, such as language, culture and history. As such, Roma are not a homogenous section of the population but rather a plethora of communities with differing experiences, characteristics and customs.[13]

In Germany, Roma are a recognized national minority, and they can be distinguished by various national, linguistic, social and religious backgrounds. One can find the official differentiation between the German Sinti and Roma, who are a recognized national minority, and Roma refugees and immigrants, who have come to Germany from different countries for different reasons over the last fifty years. This differentiation is mainly based on history: The German Sinti have been in Germany since the 15th century, and it is estimated that today about 60,000 Sinti live in Germany. The German Roma, who number roughly 10,000, have been in Germany since the 19th century and immigrated mainly from Eastern Europe.[14] During the 1960's, labor migrants from former Yugoslavia (mainly from Serbia, Bosnia and Macedonia) immigrated to Germany. Additionally, there are Roma refugees who have come mainly from Bosnia, Serbia-Montenegro and Kosovo since the 1990s.

This rough division already reveals the heterogeneity (motives of immigration, lifestyles, etc.) of these groups, and we can also assume a wide range of different attitudes towards what it means to be Roma. Within these four groups, there are (of course) many internal differentiations, including national origin,

---

13 Bundesministerium des Innern, *Report*, Web.

14 In the further course I use the main category Roma which includes diverse sub-groups, such as the Sinti.

religion, social status etc., so that a Community Action Group, for example, could combine people of the second generation of immigrants from Macedonia, who are German-Macedonian Muslim Sufi together with Catholic Serbs of the first generation who have been in Germany for about 10 years now.

If we look at ethnicity as a „subjectively perceived sense of belonging, based on the belief in a common culture and ancestry"[15], we can ask how this dimension of belonging becomes relevant in the process of school mediation. Many scholars hold that „ethnic groups" (Heckmann 1992, among others) have an idea of a common origin, a sense of solidarity and a shared culture and history. A collective identity therefore is based on the awareness of the group itself, and on the judgment and attribution "from outside", from other groups.[16] As the mediation in this programme is by defintion based on the idea of a collective ethnic identity, negotiating membership should play a role during the mediations and/or is a reason why it takes place.

According to a study by Hristo Kyuchukov, three different possibilities for the use of Roma mediators can be identified: First, there is the so-called "Trojan Horse", a mediator who acts mainly as an instrument of the institution with the aim of reaching out to the community and having a positive influence on it. Second, the "community activists", who see themselves as representatives of the community in the fight against oppression or unequal treatment of Roma, and who therefore work more against rather than for the institution. And finally, the "real intercultural mediator", who has knowledge of the cultural codes of the community and the institution – who is impartial and focused on improving communication and cooperation between the parties. This type of mediator will encourage both sides to take responsibility and to make active changes, if needed.[17]

As the Roma school mediators programme aims to work with mediators from inside the community – because they can have great effects as role models and improve the outreach of the mediators programme –, it is then interesting to see how this belonging is conceptualized. Interestingly, Roma school mediation is sometimes seen as *inter*cultural and sometimes as *intra*cultural mediation. As intercultural

---

15 Wimmer, Andreas: „Ethnische Grenzziehungen: Eine prozessorientierte Mehrebenentheorie". In: Müller, Marion/Zifonun, Dariuš (Eds.): *Ethnowissen. Soziologische Beiträge zu ethnischer Differenzierung und Migration*. VS Verlag: Wiesbaden 2010, p. 102 (Translation M.K.).

16 Heckmann, Friedrich: *Ethnische Minderheiten, Volk und Nation. Soziologie inter-ethnischer Beziehungen*. Stuttgart 1992, p. 57.

17 Kyuchukov: *Roma School Mediators in Berlin*, Web.

mediation as a setting which takes place between members of different „cultures", of different national backgrounds for example. And as intracultural mediation as a form where all parties have more or less the same cultural background. The latter implicitly works with the assumption that there must be certain commonalities belonging to one ethnic minority group. The intracultural perspective includes that this belonging is like sharing the same cultural background despite the differences of national background, religious affiliation and so forth. This idea shows parallels to the so-called "Insider Mediation", which takes place mostly in more traditional societies and where the "Insider Mediator" is usually also rooted in the ethnic, religious or cultural structures of the social context in which the conflict is rooted.[18] In other words the idea is, that Roma school mediators could help to strengthen the group feeling among Roma if they are members of the ethnic minority, and not just another social worker with any migration background. Through their education, language skills and insider knowledge, they would probably convey a certain image of their group, at least when it comes to intensive exchange in conversations. Hereby, the choice of the languages within the mediation already affects the abilities to persist in a conversation, depending on whether all parties communicate in their native language or have to use learner varieties, for example.[19]

According to this conceptual and factual preliminary considerations the following analytical part takes a look at the ascribed roles of the mediators and positionings within real Roma school mediation processes.

4. On (ascribed) roles of Roma school mediators

Generally speaking mediation is often defined as a „shared conflict resolution process whereby two or more parties in dispute are assisted in their negotiation by an unbiased and objective third party".[20] But what kind of mediation do we talk

---

18 Berghof Foundation, CSSP – Berlin Center für Integrative Mediation (CSSP); Center for Peace Mediation (Europa-Universität Viadrina); Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze (ZIF) (Eds.):
   Friedensmediation – Kurzinformation & Vorschläge für die Politik. Berlin 2013, p. 2, retrieved 25.03.2015, from: http://www.zif-berlin.org/fileadmin/uploads/analyse/dokumente/veroeffentlichungen/Kurzinfo_Mediation_30042013.pdf

19 Cf.: Knapp, Annelie: „Interkulturelle Kompetenz: eine sprachwissenschaftliche Perspektive". In: Auernheimer, Georg (Ed.): *Interkulturelle Kompetenz und pädagogische Professionalität*. 3. Auflage. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften: Wiesbaden 2010, p. 85.

20 Kruk, Edward (Ed): *Mediation and conflict resolution in social work and the human services*. Nelson-Hall Publishers: Chicago 1998, p. 4.

about here? As Olivier Peyroux puts it in his article on positive discrimination and Roma school mediation: The concept of mediation used by the programme ROMED

> [..] stresses three essential points which we come across again in most of the work done on the concept of mediation:
> – the presence of a latent or open conflict between two parties,
> – a request or an agreement by these two parties to appoint a neutral mediator,
> – decisions taken which lead to changes in both camps.

Next to the, by Olivier Peyroux described, very broad simmilarities we find lots of differences in the description of the work of a Roma school mediator and therefore in the idea of mediation in this context. Stating with what mediation is originally associated, the following definition of mediation by the Council of Europe in the "Guide for Roma school mediators/assistants", indicates a shift of context as the ROMED programme seeks to establish the process of mediation in a new, unfamiliar setting.

> Mediation is a process originally [accentuation M.K] associated with the resolution of conflict situations through the intervention of a neutral third party: the mediator. The mediator participates in the agreement or at the request of the parties to the conflict. The decision resolving the conflict situation is made by the parties rather than the mediator.[21]

As this statement – and also not in the further course of the statement – does not specify an alternative idea of mediation in this particular context, the following collected statements show how the role of the Roma school mediator is described within various contexts of the programme, from people who work for and with it. One of the coaches of the programme in Berlin summarizes the objectives of the training programme as follows:

> The work of the mediators consists in promoting cooperation and communication, but mainly in initiating a change of perspective. Change of perspective on the side of the teachers is mainly anti-discrimination work […] and on the side of the Roma, for example to open up career prospects, to show how a formal qualification, an education and the achievement of a job are well within reach.[22]

---

21 Rus, Calin; Zatreanu, Mihaela: Guide for Roma mediators/assistants. Published by the Council of Europe. 2009, retrieved 30.11.2014, from http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/Guide_EN.PDF

22 Cf.: Expert-Interview with Christoph Leucht, Berlin 17.09.2014. (Translation M.K.)

According to one of the initiators on the EU level, the programme's main objectives are described as follows:

> We need well-trained cultural mediators to help reach out to Roma communities. We need them to inform and advise parents on the workings of the local education system, and to help ensure that children successfully make the transition between each stage of their school career. We need mediators to bridge the gaps that exist between Roma children, families and communities, and the schools and other services which are meant to serve their needs. [..] Their mission is clear and precise – to restore and enhance dialogue and trust between the Roma communities and the societies in which they live.[23]

She also summarizes the role of a Roma school mediator based on this example:

> [..] in Romania a young Roma girl was on the point of dropping out of school because she could no longer cope with her schoolmates' bullying. Luckily, ROMED-trained mediator Elena [last name omitted, M.K.) was there for her. Elena managed to get this girl a place on an innovative programme aimed at building self-esteem. And this young girl went on to take part in the Romany Language and Literature Olympiad. She overcame others' prejudices and her own fears, and entered one of the most prestigious high schools in Bucharest. To me, this poignant example encapsulates what mediation is all about, and why it is so important.[24]

This last example shows very precisely that Roma school mediation refers more to a general assistance in everyday life, which can be performed in multiple ways. Emphasizing that this is a prime example of Roma school mediation, the speaker shows how little the underlying concept of the Roma school mediation has to do with the standard concept of mediation. Roma school mediators – and we can assume the existence of many other school mediators as well – more or less do the work of social workers and act not only as mediators in conflicts. These school mediations cannot be „reduced" to classical triadic mediations. Roma school mediators provide various kinds of assistance and the work is not reduced to the setting of the school. The main and regular work is situated here, but the mediators meet pupils and their parents within their neighbourhood, visit the pupils' homes and also help with appointments in administrative offices for example.

The so called „Code of Ethics for Mediators", published in 2012 by the programme ROMED, introduces ten statements concerning the behaviour of Roma school mediators during their work and mentions the (above briefly discussed)

---

23 Vassiliou, Androulla: Roma Mediators – the way forward, ROMED congress, Bruxelles, 17.01.2013, P. 3 f. retrieved 12.04.2014, from http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/council _europe/documents/press_corner/focus/20130117_discours_a_vassiliou_congres _des_mediateurs_romed_en.pdf

24 Vassiliou, *Roma Mediators*, p. 3 f., Web.

heterogeneity of Roma in the form of an awareness towards diverse Roma communities with different traditions and cultures. The mediator

> (1) respects the human rights and the dignity of all persons and acts with honesty and integrity in performing his/her duties; (2) works to ensure equal access to rights while respecting legal requirements and administrative procedures; (3) is responsible to help those concerned find mutually satisfactory solutions but does not have the responsibilty to provide solutions to all problems raised by beneficiaries or by the staff of the institution; (4) is proactive, has prompt reactions and develops sound prevention activities; (5) keeps confidentiality of the information obtained in the course of professional activities; (6) does not use his/her role and power to manipulate or to harm others; (7) respects the traditions and culture of the communities, provided that they are compatible with the key principles of human rights and democracy; (8) will treat all community members with equal respect and disclose publicly situations of conflict of interests; (9) makes a clear distinction between professional and private activities; (10) collaborates with other mediators and with other professionals;[25]

As we see, a variety of ideas is connected to the concept of mediation. By introducing the term "cultural mediators", it is stressed that the Roma school mediation programme wants to improve the relationship between the minority of the Roma and the respective so-called majority societies, and not just solve single problems between different parties. As they are meant to "bridge the gaps", it is clearly implied that there are differences between Roma and the official actors, which are usually seen as part of the majority society. The Roma school mediators are referred to as intermediators between *the* minority and these official actors, and not as mediators between the pupils for example. Trust and dialogue need to be built up and improved with "the societies in which they live" and do not really seem to be part of in this view. In comparison to the stated change of perspective, the adressed „cultural mediator" mainly seeks changes within the Roma community, whereas the „perspectivechanger" is not a neutral third party anymore. The Code of Ethics makes the mediator responsible for communication and understanding between the Roma communities and the respective institutions such as the schools. Insinuating that the communities may not act in accordance with the „key principles of human rights and democracy", emphasizes the conformity with the prevailing law. At the end a lot of the semantics used within the context of the programme implicitly see the responsibilty for the marginalized situation of a lot of Roma within the Roma communities.

---

25   ROMED: *Code of Ethics for Mediators.* 2012, retrieved 30.11.2014, from http://romed. coe-romact.org/sites/default/files/code%20ethicEN.pdf

5. Positionings within the Roma school mediation

With the differentiation from Kyuchukov in mind and in order to see how ideas of ethnicity, group heterogeneity, the role of the mediator and the underlying concept of mediation are reflected in real mediation processes, we will take a brief look at some first-hand exemplary data collected within a Roma school mediation. The excerpts from the conversation between a Roma school mediator and a pupil discussed here took place at an integrated secondary school in a large German city.[26] The student had just been excluded from the classroom and was instructed by the teacher to go to the social workers' room. There, the pupil meets the Roma school mediator, who invites the pupil for a talk. The two of them then have a conversation which lasts approximately one hour, sitting at a table in the social workers' room. I was introduced as the mediators' colleague, who would like to witness a mediation.[27] The student is, at the time of the recording, 14 years of age, born in Germany and her parents are both from Serbia. The Roma school mediator is, at the time of the recording, in her 40s, was born in Serbia and has lived in Germany for about 15 years. Both speak Serbian and Romanes besides German, which in the case of the pupil is her mother tongue and in the case of the mediator is her third language. She started learning German when she came to Germany 15 years ago.

As the data collected so far has shown, the role of the mediator varies very much from conversation to conversation. The following first brief statement shows how and in what matter the mediator stresses her membership of the school system. The two speakers talk about a classmate of the pupil who had missed lots of classes lately.[28] The mediator establishes her position as part of the school

---

26 Conversational situations which are recorded for my doctoral thesis and are thus considered part of the mediations are situations in which there are two or more parties with a Roma school mediator in a quasi „closed" conversation. Situations in schoolyards, in hallways or at locations outside the school are involved, but can not be recorded, and are thus not subject to a detailed conversational analysis.

27 I sit behind the two on a sofa, but can see both speakers very well and record the conversation by audio recording. During the conversation, a social worker enters the room, who does not sit down, but is engaged in various activities and participates repeatedly in the conversation. I do not participate in the conversation, except by a few approving laughs. My presence and the fact of the entering social worker make clear that the conversation does not take place in a protected, concealed space. Accordingly, the possible consequences for the openness and lack of confidentiality for the two speakers has to be taken into consideration.

28 S1 stands for speaker 1 who is the pupil and S2, the speaker 2, for the mediator.

system (line 06) by adressing formal rules and demanding authority. She trys to make a clue of what the pupil knows and thinks about the times of absence of the classmate.[29]

```
      01    S1:    sie MEINT=sie hat immer BAuchschmerzen
                   she says she always has a belly ache

      02    S2:    dre:i wochen la:ng,
                   for three weeks,

      03    S1:    j::a ((lacht))
                   yes ((laughs))

      04    S2:    und nich zum arzt hingehen,
                   and not going to a doctor,

      05    S1:    sie meint DOCH sie geht beim arzt und so
                   she says yes she goes to a doctor

→     06    S2:    a:ber wir bekommen keine entschuldigung;
                   but we haven't received any doctor's excuse;

      07    S1:    ich weiß nich
                   I don't know
```

The category-bound activity "Entschuldigung bekommen" (to receive a doctor's excuse) puts the mediator on one level with the teachers and the school system as only the "authorities" demand an excuse. The „we" therefore refers to the mediator as part of the school employees. It does not reflect the mediators intermediary position between the pupils and the teachers anymore. She clearly states in whose name she is speaking at the moment.

In some cases the mediator also shows clear signs of insider-knowledge and tries to establish understanding by emphasizing her role as part of the Roma community, like the following excerpt shows:

```
      01    S2:    woher kommst du genau,
                   where are you from exactly,

      02    S1:    aus serbien
                   from serbia

      03    S2:    wo,
                   where,

      04    S1:    äm (dings) wie heißt es noch mal,
                   uhm (whatever) how is it called,
```

---

29   The recordings have been transcribed according to GAT (Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem). Cf: http://www.gespraechsforschungQozs.de/heft2009/pxQgat2.pdf

```
05      S2:      warst du nisch in dem stadt,
                 have you never been to that city,

06      S1:      DOCH: ich vergiss imma mein stadt wie die
                 heißt ((lacht))
                 YES: but I always forget the name of my city ((laughs))

07               (-)

08      S2:      (), << Nennt einen Städtenamen >>
                     << States a city name >>

09      S1:      da << wiederholt den Namen der Stadt >>
                 yes << repeats the name of the city >>

10      S2:      oka:y isch kenne disch ((lacht)) (--) ABER was macht
                 deine zwei geschwister,
                 oka:y I know you ((laughs)) (--) BUT what do your two sibblings do,

11      S1:      einer geht kindergarten und der andere (grundschule/
                 geht schule)
                 one goes to kindergarden and the other one (to elementary school/
                 goes to school)
```

Especially interesting here is how the two speakers cooperate in order to develop the place of origin of the pupil (S1). At first the pupil marks a spatial belonging (line 02), which expresses the national affiliation (Serbia) without narrowing it down to a certain place. The question of "where" (line 03) is initially not further specified. In line 05 the speaker (S2) then makes it clear that she is asking for a city. Several phrases such as "Where are you from" (line 01), "my city" (line 06) and "I know you" (line 10) produce identification offers and ingroups. By asking further questions, the mediator directs the conversation and finally states a proposal for the possible origin of the student (line 08). Since the student accepts this proposal the spatial contextualization takes place in a cooperative joint negotiation. The question of whether the pupil has ever been to this city (line 05) opens up a realm of possibilities: Never or rarely having been in this city, does not mean that therefore the category "City of origin" or belonging to this is denied or doubted. From a liminal, undefined, state of not knowing, the two speakers work out a stable position of spatial association. The goal of negotiating appears thus in the production of a durable construction, a clear spatial demarcation and positions the mediator as an insider, as she is the one suggesting where the other one's city of origin could be.

In contrast, the following short excerpt shows how the mediator builds up an opposition and argues against the pupil (speaker 1). In this excerpt, the student is questioned by the Roma school mediator concerning her family situation. The school mediator tries to find out to what extent they talk to each other within

the family about the school situation and in general about the well-being of the teenager.

```
       01    S2:    redet dir keiner,
                    nobody talks to you,
 →     02    S1:    nee (.) ↑kod naš je to tako mi ne pričamo
                    no with us it is as if we don't talk
       03    S2:    ÜBERHAUPT nich,
                    not at all,
       04    S1:    ma zašto trebamo pričati mi [smo cigani]
                    well why should we talk we are gypsies
       05    S2:                        [na NORMAL ] na egal isch bin
                                                     auch zigeuner
                                        well that's normal it doesn't matter I am
                                        also a gypsy
       06    S1:    ((lacht))
                    ((laughs))
```

In lines 02 and 04 the pupil switches into Serbian and uses this language change for a contextualization in order to describe why they do not talk to each other a lot in her family. This assertion is expressed in the plural; it refers to a group and uses the Serbian as "we-identity" (we-code). The communicative effect which is achieved by this change is a clarification of the conversation context and production of a category-bound activity (line 04) stating that "Gypsies" do not talk.[30] The mediator (S2) does not react to the language change and continues in German. The pupil describes the boundaries of the group as impermeable and stable (line 02 and 04). S2 contradicts this and declares these boundaries permeable again by saying that she too belongs to this group and that it is not the case with her. In the further course of the conversation S1 shows no attempts to restore the category "Gypsy" alongside the activity "Do not talk" again.

In summary, the variation within the positionings and the (cooperative) negotiating of membership is obvious; sometimes he or she positions him- or herself as a part of the community, as an ally, sometimes as a member of the ingroup but with different points of view, and sometimes as part of the school system as well. Already these short excerpts show that the typology of Kyuchukov can not be understood in an essentialistic way. Depending on the situation we have seen all three "types of mediators" within one conversation.

---

30   This is the first and only time that the word Gypsy is used during this mediation talk.

6. Discussion

As we have seen, the conceptual interconnection of Roma school mediation and social work seems to ensure that the mediation in this context is also dealing with a situation of social inequality. The institutional framework is characterized by the schools, the EU-programme and the civic initiatives that employ or place the school mediators at the respective schools.[31] Every single position within this system is of course highly marked by hierarchical structures, whereat the pupils are usually seen as the wards, the dependents, the teachers as the advisors and in the middle the school mediators try to establish a intermediary function.

The possible fracture of the role between the work as a mediator and as a social worker has to be taken into consideration. Are the mediators capable of working in both roles at the same time? Are these two roles at all compatible? And if so, how are they successfully applied for eachother in the everyday work of the Roma school mediators?

Maartens sees mediation as a „natural step for social workers" and „a valuable addition to the services offered to the clients", so that mediation is added to the work of social workers and can be a service or a tool within the social work.[32] „In relation to mediation, social work particularly promotes empowerment of individuals through the education of conflict resolution and communication skills, and enhances their well-being in that individuals learn new effective ways of engaging with one another during conflict."[33]

Also, the ascriptions of different roles and concepts within the same programme show a wide range of different ideas towards the role of a mediator who is ascribed to a certain group and as a "cultural mediator" has to mediate between *a minority* and *a majority* society. It is therefore a matter of emprirical studies to ask whether the institutions responsible for this programme, emphasize ethnic boundaries by focusing on ethnicity as the relevant difference marker. Is, as in the case of Roma school mediation, the ethnic dimension really that relevant to the negotiations in the school context? Or are perhaps (also) national categories, linguistic boundaries, status affiliations, etc. related to the (perceived) difficulties between teachers and pupils? The (as yet not really institutionalized) programme itself operates an ethnic boundary that is, recorded and repeated by the actors

---

31 Wimmer, p. 101.

32 Maartens, Elize: Mediating adolescent-caregiver Conflict: Guidelines for Social Workers. Stellenbosch: Universität Stellenbosch, unpublished master's thesis 2007, p. 58, retrieved 10.11.2014, from http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/2216.

33 Maartens, Mediating adolescent-caregiver Conflict, p. 5.

who work with and for it. Against this institutionalized perspective would speak if the ethnic boundaries are drawn within the mediation, and therefore maintained within interactions in the form of dialogic encounters.[34] In the course of the indicated research project, further investigation based upon these remarks will be needed.

In any case, a structured evaluation and monitoring of the real necessity for Roma school mediation at German schools would help to break the wide-spread narrative that Roma per se are in need of help. While the sensitization of teachers and school management, which leads to the introduction of the programme at the respective schools, points out that there are certain problems at these schools, it would help to strengthen the position of the mediators and may be weaken "sceptical" votes if these difficulties were structured and founded in facts.

All in all we can say that the ethnicization of school mediation, as it exists in the programme discussed here, proposes to minimize discrepancies and produce greater equality between the mediator and Roma pupils by training members of the Roma minority. But, since Roma school mediators of course not only care for the Roma pupils at their schools, but in their everyday work, they also intervene in situations where non-Roma are included. They do not only mediate between Roma and non-Roma, but generally between all parties in a conflict, Roma school mediation as an ethnicized mediation, also constructs cultural differences and at least two homogenic groups. Its meant to overcome social boundaries by empowering members of the community but it also emphasizes difference and implies homogenization.

Literature

Berghof Foundation, CSSP – Berlin Center für Integrative Mediation (CSSP); Center for Peace Mediation (Europa-Universität Viadrina); Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze (ZIF) (Eds.): Friedensmediation – Kurzinformation & Vorschläge für die Politik. Berlin 2013, retrieved 25.03.2015, from http://www.zif-berlin.org/fileadmin/uploads/analyse/dokumente/veroeffentlichungen/Kurzinfo_Mediation_30042013.pdf

Bundesministerium des Innern (Ed.): *Report from the Federal Republic of Germany to the European Commission. An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 – Integrated packages of measures to promote the integration and participation of Sinti and Roma in Germany.* 2011, retrieved 12.04.2014, from http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_germany_strategy_en.pdf

---

34 Wimmer, p. 114 f.

Dittman, Jörg: „Zur Evaluation von Mediationsprojekten an Schulen" In: Simsa, Christiane/ Schubarth, Wilfried (Ed.): *Konfiktmanagement an Schulen – Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Schulmediation*. Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung: Frankfurt am Main 2001, pp. 63–75.

Heckmann, Friedrich: *Ethnische Minderheiten, Volk und Nation. Soziologie interethnischer Beziehungen*. Stuttgart 1992.

Knapp, Annelie: „Interkulturelle Kompetenz: eine sprachwissenschaftliche Perspektive". In: Auernheimer, Georg (Ed.): *Interkulturelle Kompetenz und pädagogische Professionalität*. 3. Auflage. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften: Wiesbaden 2010, pp. 81–97.

Kruk, Edward (Ed): *Mediation and conflict resolution in social work and the human services*. Nelson-Hall Publishers: Chicago 1998.

Kyuchukov, Hristo: Roma school mediators in Berlin. Commissioned by the RAA Berlin, Sponsored by the Freudenberg Foundation. 2011, retrieved 12.04.2014, from http://www.raa-berlin.de/Neu2011/PDFDatein/Kyuchukov, %20Roma%20School%20Mediation%20evaluation%20report.pdf

Maartens, Elize: Mediating adolescent-caregiver Conflict: Guidlines for Social Workers. Stellenbosch: Universität Stellenbosch, Unveröffentlichte Masterarbeit 2007, retrieved 10.11.2014, from http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/2216

Müller, Marion/Zifonun, Dariuš (Eds.): *Ethnowissen. Soziologische Beiträge zu ethnischer Differenzierung und Migration*. VS Verlag: Wiesbaden 2010.

Peyroux, Olivier: The question of Roma mediators and positive discrimination. 2011, retrieved 30.11.2014, from http://srap-project.eu/files/2011/07/Article-sur-la-m%C3%A9diation-Olivier-Peyroux-VF-EN-relu-par-Agir.pdf

Schmitt, Anna/Bytyci, Hamze/Heine, Wolfgang: *The Berlin mobile contact point for EU migrant workers and Roma from the perspective of the service providers*. EUROCITIES report. 2011, retrieved 12.04.2014, from http://nws.eurocities. eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES%20report%20-%20Contact%20point%20 for%20Roma%20in%20Berlin.pdf

Simsa, Christiane/Schubarth, Wilfried (Ed.): *Konfiktmanagement an Schulen – Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Schulmediation*, Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung: Frankfurt am Main 2001.

Strauß, Daniel (Ed.): Studie zur aktuellen Bildungssituation deutscher Sinti und Roma. Dokumentation und Forschungsbericht. 2011. retrieved 12.04.2014, from http://www.stiftung-evz.de/fileadmin/user_upload/EVZ_Uploads/ Publikationen/Studien/2011_Marburg-strauss_studie_sinti_bildung.pdf

ROMED: *About Romed,* 2014, retrieved 30.11.2014, from http://romed.coe-romact.org/

ROMED: *Code of Ethics for Mediators*. 2012, retrieved 30.11.2014, from http://romed.coe-romact.org/sites/default/files/code%20ethicEN.pdf

Rus, Calin/Zatreanu, Mihaela: Guide for Roma School Mediators/Assitants, 2006, European Code of Ethics for mediators. retrieved 12.04.2014, from http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/Guide_EN.PDF

Vassiliou, Androulla: Roma Mediators – the way forward, ROMED congress, Bruxelles, 17.01.2013, retrieved 12.04.2014, from http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/council_europe/documents/press_corner/focus/20130117_discours_a_vassiliou_congres_des_mediateurs_romed_en.pdf

Wimmer, Andreas: „Ethnische Grenzziehungen: Eine prozessorientierte Mehrebenentheorie". In: Müller, Marion/Zifonun, Dariuš (Eds.): *Ethnowissen. Soziologische Beiträge zu ethnischer Differenzierung und Migration*. VS Verlag: Wiesbaden 2010, pp. 99–152.

Sascha Wölck
(Frankfurt/Oder)
and Christina Rogers
(Dresden)

Labeling difference – On discrimination and the social standing of children fathered by US soldiers during the Vietnam War

Abstract: Während des acht Jahre andauernden amerikanischen Vietnamkrieges kämpften in Vietnam rund drei Millionen US-amerikanische Soldaten. 1975 endete der Krieg mit der ersten militärischen Niederlage in der Geschichte der USA. Bereits zwei Jahre vor der Befreiung von Saigon, waren die US-amerikanischen Truppen aus Vietnam abgezogen. Was blieb, war der Krieg und die Folgen einer beispiellosen Zerstörung eines Landes. Geblieben sind auch Zehntausende von Kindern vietnamesischer Frauen und amerikanischer Männer, die aus Beziehungen, Sexarbeit, Romanzen und Vergewaltigungen hervorgingen. In der Wahrnehmung großer Teile der Gesellschaft repräsentierten diese jungen Menschen Verstöße gegen einen Komplex unterschiedlicher sozialer Normen.

Die Diskriminierung nahm unterschiedliche Ausformungen an, wobei rassistische Ausgrenzung dominierte.

Mit diesem Aufsatz skizzieren wir Dynamiken politischer sowie sozialer Systeme in Vietnam und ihre Interdependenzen zu den gesellschaftlichen Positionierungen dieser Gruppe. Als Ausgangspunkt dient ein Korpus von leitfadengestützten Interviews mit 29 Betroffenen, die in Vietnam zwischen 2012 und 2014 realisiert wurden.

Schlagworte: Vietnam Krieg, Diskriminierung, Markierung, Intersektionalität

Keywords: Vietnam War, Discrimination, Labeling, Intersectionality, Otherness

Introduction

Danh[1] has started a new job. He works at a parking lot in front of an English school in Ho Chi Minh City and looks after scooters. To get the job, he dyed his rather blond hair black as a precaution, because his hair color is naturally lighter than that of the majority of people in Vietnam. The dyeing of Danh's hair was a tactical move to avoid being recognized as ›*con lai Mỹ*‹ – a term used to mark children of

---

[1]   All names of interview partners have been changed in this article to ensure the anonymity of informants.

US soldiers and Vietnamese mothers in Vietnam. Danh never met his biological father Joseph, or Joe, who was an American nurse stationed at the 85th Evacuation Hospital in Quy Nhơn between 1969 and 1971. No other group of people within Vietnamese society had a connection to the USA so visibly marked on the surface of their bodies as the con lai Mỹ, tens of thousands of children who were born as a result of relationships, prostitution, romances and rape with or by Americans. From the perspective of a large portion of society, con lai Mỹ represented offences against social norms.[2] Their social exclusion, at least in its extreme form, began after the withdrawal of American troops in 1973 and the Fall of Saigon in 1975. After 30 years of war, which was a time of fundamental social and political change, social roles and images of the enemy redefined themselves anew – especially in the south of Vietnam. The sex industry was regarded as an indicator of the unsuitable behavior of women during the war, but especially stigmatized after it had ended. Poverty and the absence of (biological) fathers were regarded as a stigma, and racial discrimination evolved in different forms. Relationships across ethnic or racial boundaries were seen as a breach in the normative social structure, whereby children fathered by Black[3] men were more likely to be racially discriminated against than children of White fathers.[4]

In this article, we wish to give a brief introduction to the different social settings and acts of discrimination against children fathered by US soldiers from the war era until today. A series of interviews conducted with con lai Mỹ between 2012 and 2014 in Vietnam form the basis of the paper.[5] The overall goal of this investigation is, on the one hand, to archive perspectives of this group of people on their life, as well as their social and political surroundings; and, on the other hand, to determine historical contexts that could have led to the specific social standing of con lai Mỹ until the present day.

When Danh was interviewed in 2012, he did not speak about a current fear of discrimination, although one can assume that he was somewhat insecure about

---

2   Cp. Yarborough, Trin: *Surviving Twice: Amerasian Children of the Vietnam War*. Potomac Books Inc.: Washington 2005.

3   In this text, we will use the words Black and White with capital letters to distinguish the terms from naturalizing, racial categories and to mark them as constructed, yet socially significant markings.

4   Cp. McKelvey, Robert S.: *The Dust of Life. America's Children Abandoned in Vietnam*. University of Washington Press: Seattle, London 1999, p. 23–27.

5   Research underlying this text is based on a series of interviews led in Đà Nẵng and Ho Chi Minh City between 2012 and 2014 by Sascha Wölck. The sample consists of 28 con lai Mỹ: 18 *women* and 10 *men;* 10 marked as *Black*, 18 as *White*; born between 1965 and 1974.

openly showing that he is con lai Mỹ, given that he hid his natural hair color. Many other people that were interviewed since 2012 in Đà Nẵng and Ho Chi Minh City also speak of experiences of discrimination, although the data shows that many prejudices that were prevalent in Vietnamese society after the war have lost their power considerably.

To understand the social positioning of con lai Mỹ throughout history, it is important to grasp the impacts a label such as con lai Mỹ has had on this specific collective. To highlight this form of labeling, it is necessary to describe the political, economic and social structures surrounding the group of people in question. What are the conditions by which people are marked as con lai Mỹ, and what does this name entail? What are the structures that create and reproduce these forms of exclusion that are linked to the label? Are negative attributions a result of war trauma, political enemies, ethnic and racial prejudices, or rather a question of gender and class? In the following section, we will give a brief introduction into the problems raised by the name ›con lai Mỹ‹ from a scholarly perspective, and thereby deliver attributions that people affected by the name face in their daily lives. We will then describe different forms of discrimination and structures that could have led to the specific social standings of con lai Mỹ throughout history, and highlight the categories *gender*, *class*, *ethnicity* and/or *race* as dominant modes of representation and exclusion.

The intricacies of naming

A basic translation of ›con lai Mỹ‹ is ›Child Mix America‹. It is a term that points to the different origins of both parents, where the alleged US birth parent is stressed by the word ›Mỹ‹. The adjective ›Mỹ‹ is particularly interesting, because it points to the ›Otherness‹ of the child, that part of the person which indicates that the person was not born from a relationship between two people who are defined as being ›Vietnamese‹. As we shall see in the second section, the indicators for being Vietnamese do not necessarily mean citizenship. A child born from a *Việt Kiều*[6], or better *Người Việt Hải Ngoại*[7], with US citizenship and a Vietnamese citizen does not trigger the labeling ›con lai Mỹ‹; rather, they are either identified through a US American parent (documents, known relationships etc.) or through racial and ethnic profiling, which leads to the usage of the name. The term does not clearly mark the historical collective of people born during the Vietnam War, because all

---

6   Việt Kiều is a term used to refer to Vietnamese people living outside of Vietnam.

7   Người Việt Hải Ngoại is the preferred term within the Overseas Vietnamese community.

people who were born in Vietnam before, during and after the war who have an American and a Vietnamese parent are included in the expression.

The most common name within academic texts on children born by US soldiers in Vietnam is ›Amerasians‹[8]. The notable quality of this imposed term is that it is practically non-existent as an expression in Vietnam, and therefore does not have an internal history within the socio-political sphere. To be precise, the positive quality of the term ›Amerasians‹ is that it does not have a discriminatory connotation within the context of Vietnam, and can be used as a fairly neutral term within local communication. For the same reason, the term ›Amerasians‹ does not belong to any form of self-labeling of our interviewees. From the perspective of con lai Mỹ who went to the USA, and especially for anglophone academic texts, the term ›Amerasians‹ has a certain validity. Although the term was initially introduced by US immigration offices to describe children with an Asian mother and a US military father, today a community does actually define itself with this term within the USA. Thus, ›Amerasians‹ currently includes all people who have an American and Asian parent, although in popular use the term is also employed to describe US citizens with Asian ancestry, and can therefore be used as a pejorative and essentializing label. In Trin Yarborough's book *Surviving Twice – Amerasian children of the Vietnam War*[9], the term is well-suited for analysis, as she traces biographies which lead from Vietnam to the USA. In the context of this paper, the adoption of the term is unsatisfactory for three reasons: First, ›Amerasians‹ is unknown to the majority of our interview partners, and can therefore not be considered as suitable for further research in this specific field. Second, the selectivity of the term is relatively small. ›Amerasians‹ is a term that can be used for large groups of people in and outside of the USA, and therefore does not refer to the particular experiences and circumstances of the con lai Mỹ in Vietnam as compared to similar and/or different stories in the Philippines, Japan or other countries. Third, the term is inevitably positioned within a discourse of so-called ›America's children‹. Western academic literature, political and public dialogues have often used ›Amerasians‹ in relation to themes about America's alleged ›lost children‹ in Vietnam. Considering the American hegemonic history in Vietnam, as well as discourses leading to misrepresentations of Vietnam that legitimized many adoptions, the term cannot be implemented without problematic or even offensive connotations.

---

8   Cp. DeBonis, 1995; Yarborough, Trin: *Surviving Twice: Amerasian Children of the Vietnam War*. Potomac Books Inc.: Washington 2005.

9   Ibid.

In her book *The Life We Were Given – Operation Babylift, International Adoption and the Children of War in Vietnam,*[10] Dana Sachs avoids any commitment to a distinct term and uses both ›Amerasians‹ as well as ›con lai‹. ›Con lai‹ implies a ›non-Vietnamese parent‹ for the people involved. While ›con lai‹ and also ›con lai Mỹ‹ were indeed regarded as discriminatory titles in the post-war era,[11] the names are perceived today as neutral labels according to interviewees. When asked about her opinion on the theoretical problem of terms and definitions, the interview partner Hà recommended the use of ›con lai‹. Against her advice, we decided not to use ›con lai‹ as a concept to work with. Similar to ›Amerasian‹, ›con lai‹ is an undifferentiated term. The omitting of the adjectival ›Mỹ‹ (America/USA) here allows a distinction between con lai Mỹ and other historical groupings that are important to Vietnam's history, such as offspring of Japanese (›con lai Nhật‹) and French (›con lai Pháp‹) soldiers. Although one can find similarities between the social positioning of ›con lai Pháp‹ in comparison to con lai Mỹ after the Vietnam War, ›con lai‹ as a stand-alone term does not entail the specific social, economic and political situations of people with foreign military fathers in Vietnam in this particular historical time frame. Speaking about con lai Mỹ who were born during US military presence in Vietnam therefore specifically encompasses the historical conditions during and immediately after the war, as well as the experiences of the massive changes in their social positioning while growing up in the 1980's and 1990's – a time of profound economic and social changes due to Vietnam's economic opening *Đổi mới*.

In its literal meaning, ›con lai Mỹ‹ bundles many of the key problems people who were fathered by US soldiers face in Vietnam: they are constantly thrown back to their point of alleged ›origin‹ – their status as a child resulting from a Vietnamese mother and an American father. What the term thereby stresses are the circumstances of their birth and nothing of the life that followed thereafter. The fact that most con lai Mỹ who stayed in Vietnam have no or only poor knowledge of the English language, were educated in Vietnamese schools, grew up within a Vietnamese society and its politics, have a Vietnamese mother or more often a whole Vietnamese family which adopted them, is usually unacknowledged. ›Con lai Mỹ‹ therefore delivers a terminology with which people can possibly be essentialized as an own distinct subjectivity signified as ›Child Mix America‹, wherein the ›Other‹ within the ›mix‹ plays a dominant role. Thus, the term itself points to the discrimination and segregation that interviewees experienced in their lives.

---

10 Sachs, Dana: *The Life We Were Given: Operation Babylift. International Adoption, and the Children of War in Vietnam.* Beacon Press: Boston 2010.

11 Cp. DeBonis, 1995, p. 5.

So why then use the term as a scholar in the field? Two reasons indicate con lai Mỹ as being a useful term: in the course of the research, it became more and more apparent that people within the chosen field had taken on the term as a positive label of self-definition, leading to the creation of a community under the name con lai Mỹ. Not only could we find a slow but constant tendency to release the term from its pejorative and possible discriminatory impact within mainstream society, most importantly it showed that the term delivered a structure under which many people could establish solidarity networks. It is therefore noteworthy that the name con lai Mỹ has been, and is still, undergoing constant shifts in meaning, a process in which the people immediately affected by it are very engaged. This point brings us to the second reason why con lai Mỹ seems a well-suited conceptual term for the analysis of this group of people: it is a multifaceted term. Keeping con lai Mỹ as a conceptual term incorporates the self-designations of interview partners, and at the same time conveys its possible derogative meaning within Vietnamese society. So, as an analytic category, the term neither functions as a seamless cover, nor does it reproduce an entirely repressive or hurtful labeling. We consider the ambiguity of the term as strengthening the analysis, because the social realities of con lai Mỹ are no less ambiguous.

Creating difference – Family, Gender and Ethnicity

Othering mechanisms that dissociate the con lai Mỹ individually and collectively from Vietnam – and also link them to the USA – appear as dominating topics in the interviews that form the basis of this text. They are influential as tools for social exclusion and discrimination, as well as the self-identification of many interview partners. Interviewee Dũng states: »My classmates always asked me why I do not go back to my home country [the USA,]. I replied: if I go back or not is not your problem.«[12] The most obvious issue of these attributions is that con lai Mỹ not only have American fathers, but also Vietnamese mothers, and it would seem no less natural to identify con lai Mỹ as Vietnamese instead of American. Whatever definition one might have of cultural identity, the interview partners are surely closer to a Vietnamese cultural identity than an American one. Only one of the interview partners speaks English, for example. The question is, therefore, which

---

12 Dũng, interviewed by Sascha Wölck, 2012. There are also many cases, in which the linkage to the USA is an important personal reference point. Hoàng states: »The only thing I am proud of are my people. The people of my father. I dream of being in the military, like my father. If I could have stayed with my father, I would have done the same job as him in the US military.« Hoàng, interviewed by Sascha Wölck, 2012

factors are effective in building the basis of these misrecognitions that seem to be more dominant than socio-cultural upbringing, and that hinder the identification of con lai Mỹ via their life in Vietnam or their Vietnamese mothers.

One possible approach can be made from a linguistic-cultural perspective of the family and gender: within the Confucian social structure, one can differentiate between an ›inner family‹ and an ›outer family‹. The paternal branch is the ›inner family‹, and the maternal branch is the ›outer family‹. The system of the inner and outer family reads as follows:

- ›ông nội‹ ›Interior – Grandfather‹ (father of father) as well as ›ba nội‹ – Interior – Grandmother (mother of father).

As well as

- ›ông ngoại‹ ›External – Grandfather‹ (father of mother) as well as ›ba ngoại‹ – Exterior – Grandmother (mother of mother).

This patrilineal kinship system could be a possible explanation for the precarious positioning con lai Mỹ had within many families: In all cases, the biological fathers – the ›interior-lines‹ – were absent.[13] Interview partner Dũng refers to himself according to this structure and explains: »It is like this: I am only a ›ngoại‹ child, not a ›nội‹ child. That is not what I am.«[14] It is likely that in some cases con lai Mỹ symbolized the sexual activities of women outside of the family or traumatic experiences via practices of sexual violence and domination by US soldiers that affected and even threatened the family constellation. Despite these perspectives, women and the maternal line were indeed always ›ngoại‹ – exterior, according to the Confucian understanding. One cannot claim that Confucianism is the only socially structuring and relevant belief system in Vietnam. Buddhism and Christianity play important roles (and sects that oscillate between them, like Cao Đài). Especially within the 20th century, secular ideologies, prominently communism, were strong and demanded equality for women. However, communist politics of the family have taken a constant contradictory position concerning gender roles. At an early stage, communists in Vietnam strengthened the position of women: in 1930, equality of genders was established in the party program, and the state guaranteed men and women the same institutional rights in the constitu-

---

13 It must be noted, that there is one form of exception: The stepfather of Tính refused to acknowledge that Tính is a con lai Mỹ and not his biological son. By treating him as his biological son and demanding from every other person to see him as such, the stepfather created an interior-line of the family for Tính and himself.

14 Nghi, interviewed by Sascha Wölck, 2012.

tion of 1945. At the same time, one can trace a hesitation to question classic gender roles within the family. For decades, the ›Gia đình văn hóa‹ (English ›Culture Family‹), which has social-conservative and Confucian traditions at its core, was proclaimed as an ideal by communist government propaganda.

This heterogeneous picture is also reflected within the sample. It not only entails biographies in which the con lai Mỹ were disadvantaged and excluded, but it also predominantly shows cases in which massive problems emerge. The biography of Nhung in Đà Nẵng is an example of a low and isolated position within the hierarchy of the family: Her mother found a new partner and he brought children of his own into the marriage. Nhung, as the daughter of the mother, was the one who was not granted any position within the constellation of the family, while the man's children became integral members of the new family. Nhung states:

> My mother got married. Other children existed in this family. This is why it was said I should live with my grandfather. He [the husband] had an own family and his wife died in the war and the man already had children. This is why he gave me to the grandfather. My mother brought me to the grandfather. I stayed there until I was grown up.[15]

According to Nhung's understanding of the situation, violence from her relatives was connected to the absence of her biological father:

> Sascha: Why did people hit you?
> Nhung: First, because I was a child without a father. Second, because I didn't have a mother. Third, I was with my grandparents and therefore couldn't go to school.[16]

Hưng, Nhung's husband, commented on the problems with Nhung's family in an interview as follows: »It was bad because she came from another blood line. This brings harm to the family.«[17] The reference to the bloodline can be understood as the dominating line of the inner family, in which fathers of individuals seem to define the ethnic and racial categories. In addition, the terms ›blood‹ and ›race‹ are often used synonymously in Vietnamese language. The question of ›wrong blood‹ could be an answer to why the family of Hai, the child of a Black French soldier and interview partner, left him in Vietnam, while other children in the family were taken abroad with them. This example also shows that Nhung should not be regarded as a singular or unique case.

When wanting to grasp the discrimination against con lai Mỹ in their daily lives, it is therefore crucial to take ethnic or racial categorizations into account as

---

15 Nhung, interviewed by Sascha Wölck, 2014.
16 Ibid.
17 Hưng, interviewed by Sascha Wölck, 2014.

well as gender issues. As our arguments shall suggest, many of the con lai Mỹ that grew up in a family without their biological fathers were regarded as incomplete according to the Confucian tradition of the family. This conservative ideal of the family put more pressure on women, who had experiences as sex-workers during the time of war, and also led to discrimination against con lai Mỹ due to alleged sexual wrongdoings by their mothers. Dũng states: »Back then, as today: people talk bad about families with con lai children. They say: ›You are con lai – fuck you. They look at your mother and think she is a prostitute.‹«[18] Kien Nguyen describes the case of his mother, who was forced to speak to a public crowd in 1975: A confession of her wrongdoings against the Communist Party, the new government and the social corpus was expected of her, because her »mixed-blood children«[19] were regarded as indicators for prostitution. She being forced to humiliate herself performatively via a speech-act in front of a small public crowd shows the precarious social status of former female sex workers and mothers of con lai Mỹ in post-war society.[20] As one can also see in this example, it is not only a marker or a label like con lai Mỹ which entails segregation from normative society via the term ›Child Mix America‹, but also the usage of speech in the public sphere which plays a crucial role in understanding repressive forms of language within society. Kien's mother was forced to tell the public what they already knew or at least assumed of her in an act of self-accusation and self-shaming. The indicators for her alleged unsuitable behavior were thereby her children, which were marked as ethnically different. Other cases show similar mechanisms. Con lai Mỹ were blamed for the sexual actions of their mothers, and vice versa, the mothers were socially confronted for having con lai Mỹ as children. Visual appearance and the question of ethnicity raised by public readings of people show that often simple racial profiling led to the labeling of children as con lai Mỹ, whereby lighter or darker skin color and hair were regarded as indicators of their (and their mother's) difference.

Although the ›culture family‹ is not specifically described as ethnically ›Vietnamese‹, one can find numerous traces of racial discrimination against con lai Mỹ. An indicator for a more severe form of discrimination against children of Black soldiers is the term ›Mỹ đen‹, which translates as ›Black American‹. Interview partners and theoretical texts often distinguish between offspring of White and Black fathers, because children experienced different forms of discrimination according to their outer appearance. None of the interview partners spoke of ›con

---

18 Dũng, interviewed by Sascha Wölck 2012.
19 Cp. Nguyen, 2001, p. 111.
20 Ibid.

lai Mỹ đen‹ (Black con lai Mỹ) or ›con lai Mỹ trắng‹ (White con lai Mỹ). Instead, shorter forms like ›Mỹ đen‹ or ›Mỹ trắng‹ were common. ›Mỹ đen‹ was cited by informants to describe situations in which they experienced discrimination. As a locution, it was therefore strictly used as a form of negative appellation from the outside world. With this shorter form ›Mỹ đen‹, people addressed were stripped from their hybridity, from an identification via their mother, their place of birth, or their upbringing. Interview partner Hương states:

> They shouted at me I should go away. A stone shot with a sling, with which one usually hunts birds, hit me on the head. Yet, as I became older, the discrimination stopped. As a young person, I was constantly exposed to such situations; I was again and again discriminated. […] Mỹ trắng could go about undisturbed. But when they saw Mỹ đen, they threw stones at them. […] Mỹ trắng never had problems. With white skin, one looked like everyone else. […] When I went to school, they waited for me behind the gates and shouted: ›Mỹ đen, go back to where you came from!‹[21]

As the quote shows, the pupils of Hương's school approached her with racist views, in which Black skin and curled hair are read as markers of negative difference, as that which cannot be Vietnamese. With respect to interviews conducted with children of White fathers, we do not want to go as far as Hương and claim that they had no problems of their own. As Danh at the beginning of the text shows, even lighter hair color or other markers of Whiteness were regarded as negative traits within Vietnamese society. What is often true, though, is that White con lai Mỹ could pass as Vietnamese far easier than children of Black soldiers. Among 18 White interviewees, three were not aware of being con lai Mỹ until they were told by relatives when they were teenagers. However, all twelve Black con lai Mỹ were marked as Black and con lai Mỹ since childhood. As extensive interviews in the field show, ethnic or racial discrimination, as well as discrimination as children ›without biological fathers‹, are the strongest and most frequent forms of exclusion con lai Mỹ have faced in their lives. However, it must be noted that this form of discrimination was predominantly a matter of the public sphere. As the family was often a space of private exclusion for many con lai Mỹ, the sample does not deliver indicators that people of darker color were more strongly affected by discrimination within the family than White con lai Mỹ. It can be said with certainty, though, that racial profiling was a paramount factor for discriminatory actions against con lai Mỹ in public areas, such as schools or work places. Even the nicknames of some of the interviewees still end with ›đen‹ (black), which never occurs with ›trắng‹ (white).

---

21 Hương, interviewed by Sascha Wölck, 2012.

Gastambide assesses the precarious social positioning of con lai Mỹ, and concludes that they were imagined as an own *race* within Vietnamese society:

> They are outcasts of the Vietnamese society […]. We are part of the gruesome history of Vietnam. The War gave birth to us and now we are the absolute losers. We became a race within the Vietnamese race, created by the American presence in Vietnam.[22]

In a similar conclusion, interview partner Hương summarized her experiences of discrimination with the sentence: »They mobbed me, because another blood flows within me«[23]. Another typical rhetoric of the time is delivered with Nhat's sentence: »They said I should go back to America – I had curly hair«[24].

An analysis of our data in the field shows that assumed communist vocabulary was hardly used against children of US soldiers throughout the 1980s. In rare cases during the first years after the war, con lai Mỹ and their mothers were labeled political traitors or imperialists. Such vocabulary completely vanishes from the scene in the 1980's, showing a clear and early focus on ethnic categories and labels concerning the family. The marker con lai Mỹ, as already highlighted in the first section, reduces people to an alleged ethnically mixed race. The part of themselves that could be considered ›Vietnamese‹ is mostly forgotten or simply overwritten by that which is seen as different. As the terms ›Mỹ đen‹ and ›Mỹ trắng‹ show more specifically, people are blatantly reduced to their physical appearance and discriminated against for their alleged ethnic difference to mainstream society. What can be excluded from all of the statements about con lai Mỹ is a reaction to them as unquestionably deviant from society. Stuart Hall describes this mechanism precisely:

> Here, racism is particularly powerful and its imprint on popular consciousness especially deep, because in such racial characteristics as color, ethnic origin, geographical position, etc., racism discovers what other ideologies have to construct: an apparently "natural" or universal basis in nature itself.[25]

Also, as a scholar with a background outside of Vietnamese society, one must be constantly aware of this seemingly universal basis which has a naturalizing effect via the attributions of members of the field. Yarborough's *Surviving Twice* is one of

---

22 Translated by authors; Gastambide, Remy: „Staub des Lebens. Die schwarzen ‚Amerasians' von Vietnam". In: Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Hrsg.): *Gap Viet Nam. Selbstverlag*: Berlin 1999, p. 102.

23 Hương, interviewed by Sascha Wölck, 2012.

24 Nhat, interviewed by Sascha Wölck, 2012.

25 Hall, Stuart: "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance." In: Baker, Huston A. Jr.; Diawara, Manthia; Lindeborg, Ruth H. (Ed.): *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, London 1996, p. 56.

the best academic publications on con lai Mỹ, and delivers the most extensive and detailed existing study utilizing this mostly disregarded academic perspective on the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, Yarborough's choice of words in describing the physical appearances of con lai Mỹ, as well as her analytic evaluations, demonstrate a tendency to exotisize her interview partners, thereby reproducing colonial stereotypes and images of the Other. Even on the first pages of Yarborough's book, the description of the skin colors of her interviewees sounds like an assortment of colonial goods: »coffee-colored«[26], »chocolate-colored«[27] and »cocoa-colored«[28]. In her further analysis, she emphasizes that ›Amerasians‹ often have an unsettled personality, and tend to have sexual relationships with both genders,[29] seemingly suggesting that their ethnic and cultural hybridity is, or leads to, a natural biological state that can cause forms of sexual desire and mental conditions functioning in a similar duality.

As these examples show, when describing people and their lives as a scholar, there is often a fine line between wanting to live up to their experiences of difference and refraining from turning this difference into a reproduction of naturalizing and racist views common within societies, as well as social sciences. This is especially the case in field work, where many interview partners quite correctly describe themselves as different from society, and support this position by, for example, pointing to their physiological markings. To stress Stuart Hall once more:

> The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalisation. Not only, in Said's 'Orientalist' sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as 'Other'.[30]

The impact of political and economic development

After Roosevelt's insinuated promise of national independence fell short, and Vietnam was not granted independence from France after the Second World War,[31] the formulation of a cultural difference to former and future hegemonic

---

26　Yarborough, 2005, p. 4.

27　Ibid, p. 8.

28　Ibid, p. 9.

29　Ibid, p. 2, 24, 207.

30　Hall, Stuart: "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In: Rutherford, Jonathan (Ed.): *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference*. Lawrence and Wishart: London 1990, p. 225.

31　Cp. Maxner, Stephen: Vietnam und USA. In: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (Hrsg.): *APuZ Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 27/2008. Sozietäts-Verlag: Berlin 2008,

powers became more relevant. This encompassed a collective national identity as the ideological basis and connecting element of a liberating nationalism, first against France and then later against the USA. The rhetoric of the Việt Minh and their subsequent organization constructed ›being Vietnamese‹ in very vague terms as a negative image defined against past and present occupying forces within the country, one concerned with not being ›Chinese‹, ›Japanese‹, ›French‹ or ›US American‹. With the consolidation of governmental power across the whole country at the end of the Vietnam War, it seems like the Communist Party changed their rhetoric concerning the newly joined citizens of Vietnam. As we briefly mentioned earlier in the text, accusations focusing on being a child of an enemy, or ›Traitors to the People‹, hardly appear in our sample. After the enforcement of the primary goal of reunification, the constitution of Vietnamese nationalism via the identification of internal and especially external political enemies had lost its force within society. From the perspective of our interviewees, political rhetoric after 1975 plays a less important role in affecting discrimination against them than other factors. Even though con lai Mỹ are still faced with prejudices, one can trace clear shifts in their social standing from the mid 1980's until today. Two factors played a crucial role in this change within society, and interestingly enough they are both economic.

In 1985, a journalist from Newsweek took notice of homeless and begging con lai Mỹ in the metropolis Ho Chi Minh City. His portrayals of their living conditions, which were quickly linked to a public dialogue on ›our children in Vietnam‹, caused a wave of public empathy in the USA and initiated the active engagement of American charitable associations in Vietnam. Following a campaign by a group of high school students, the US government decided to implement the *Amerasian Homecoming Act* (AHA) in 1987, and the foundation of an *Amerasian Transit-Centre* in Ho Chi Minh City in 1990. According to numbers from the American consulate, 21,379 con lai Mỹ emigrated to the USA between 1988 and 2013.[32] The implementation of these acts marked a considerable change in the social conditions of con lai Mỹ. Formerly associated with poverty as well as social and ethnic transgressions, con lai Mỹ were suddenly regarded as valuable people who received tickets to the USA, a place that inevitably was linked to images of wealth and the possibility for a better life. This perception was magnified during the devastating economic situation in Vietnam after 1975, in which many

---

p. 25–32; Frey, Marc: *Geschichte des Vietnamkriegs. Die Tragödie in Asien und das Ende des amerikanischen Traums*. C.H. Beck: München 2004, p. 17.

32 Cp. http://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/AnnualReports/FY2013Annual Report/FY13AnnualReport-TableX.pdf (23.03.2014).

citizens were struggling to overcome the negative impact of 30 years of constant warfare. Con lai Mỹ suddenly received attention from a broad surrounding, most importantly by persons who were willing to adopt them or to fake family relations to them in order to apply for immigration to the USA. Hưng, the husband of interview partner Nhung, stated in an interview: »I was very poor and the money wasn't enough. I had the idea, that if I married her, she would go to the USA and take me with her or send me money«[33]. Due to this widespread misuse of the act, where alleged relatives of Amerasians tried to immigrate to the USA, the AHA was soon discredited and suspended at a preliminary stage. Of course, this sudden shift in attention and decrease in discrimination did not emerge for humanitarian reasons. Rather, con lai Mỹ had received a useful value from the American government for people willing to immigrate to the USA. As such, con lai Mỹ were again objectified; this time, not as abject or alien subjects within a ›healthy‹ Vietnamese society, but as tickets to the West. It is hardly surprising that some of the contacts con lai Mỹ had to people before the AHA had come to a halt thereafter; however, many of the informants still speak of a change and decline in social exclusionism after this phase of economic recognition. Ngọc states: »As the plan to bring con lai Mỹ from Vietnam to the USA emerged, we were not discriminated anymore«[34].

The most extensive changes in social standing took place in the 1990s, when the economic reforms Đổi mới initiated in 1986 started to have an effect on the economic lives of Vietnamese citizens. On a political level, Đổi mới not only marked an economic opening to the West, but can also be regarded as an opening with regard to Western culture. Whereas formerly the leading dictum was a cultural shielding from ideals and topics from the imperialist West, Đổi mới initiated the steps that led to the import not only of Western goods, but also of many cultural aspects, such as sports, music, food, consumer culture, valuation of status symbols, etc.. The general political discourses then started to focus on reconstructing the country by changing Vietnam's devastated economic condition since the end of the war, stressing a common future under better circumstances instead of searching for internal enemies to denounce or blame for the past. On a smaller level, the general increase in wealth, creation of jobs and increased access to health care for the citizens of Vietnam created a less tense and offensive climate for con lai Mỹ. Even though the phase of economic recognition towards con lai Mỹ put in place by the AHA and other programs described above was a fleeting

---

33 Nhung & Hưng, interviewed by Sascha Wölck, 2014.
34 Ngọc, interviewed by Sascha Wölck, 2012.

improvement, one can definitely trace a sustainable change in attitude towards con lai Mỹ in this time of economic growth. Two primary factors led to this considerable improvement in the environment surrounding the con lai Mỹ: First, the perception of the USA transformed from imperialist enemy to economic ally, and even began to represent a desirable way of living on a socio-political scale. Second, a general decrease of frustration within the private sphere in the form of better financial positioning among the general population. Finally, one can see that the class position of con lai Mỹ themselves also played a crucial role in easing social tensions. Of course, racial discrimination and transgressions against gender or family normativity were not solved by this economic wealth, yet it must be noted that many of the interviewees could use their improved class position as a form of capital to counter different forms of prejudices. Many interview partners state that once they managed to integrate into the social fabric via steady jobs or a family of their own, their stigmatization became less prevalent.[35]

A lot of interviews in the field therefore show that forms of social exclusion functioned intersectionally. Trường notes: »Because I was poor and didn't have a father, they shouted ›Mỹ đen‹ at me«[36]. Trường's attempt to explain reasons for his discrimination is exemplary for how intertwined categories of social positioning are. In this sentence, there is a mixture of class, family status and race that lie at the core of his interpretation of social exclusion. In this field of research, it is therefore important to acknowledge the intersectional and multilayered mechanisms that underlie many of con lai Mỹ's experiences.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have shown that the historical collective of people pooled under the label ›con lai Mỹ‹ have faced different forms of discrimination in their daily lives. The term ›con lai Mỹ‹ itself delivers insight into key components of social and cultural exclusion, as the term ›Child Mix America‹ was used as a negative marker pointing to the Otherness of a person in the years directly following the Vietnam War. The rehabilitation of the term as positive self-labeling, as well as a constant decline in discrimination against the con lai Mỹ, might indicate that Vietnamese society increased its level of tolerance towards children of American

---

35 While most of the Black con lai Mỹ interviewees still sense a certain degree of depreciation, most of the White con lai Mỹ do not feel discriminated anymore. Some of the latter, in contrast, show a certain pride of their visual features, like their skin color, a smaller nose or blonde hair.

36 Trường, interviewed by Sascha Wölck, 2012.

soldiers within the last decades. However, as the last chapter shows, it is problematic to view their social improvements definitively as such, because a variety of external factors changed the social prestige of the con lai Mỹ. This development, therefore, does not necessarily indicate a change in social concepts within Vietnamese society. As we have argued, crucial turning points took place in the 1990s – the time of the AHA and Đổi Mới. With the AHA, con lai Mỹ were suddenly associated with a chance to go to the USA, and therefore with the prospect of prosperity. Đổi Mới, on the other hand, made it possible for at least some of the interviewees to escape poverty (to a certain degree), and along with that discrimination as members of a lower class. Moreover, large proportions of the con lai Mỹ emigrated to the USA with the AHA; thus, the large and publicly visible group of con lai Mỹ widely vanished from Vietnam as a whole. From this perspective, one can also argue that the historical collective of con lai Mỹ structurally changed, thereby affecting the social standing of people that stayed in Vietnam.

One of the unexpected findings of this research is that discrimination against con lai Mỹ within the family is a very important aspect to consider when trying to grasp experiences con lai Mỹ have had on a daily basis. The Confucian belief system, in which children are distinguished between ›nội‹ – interior and ›ngoại‹ – exterior, shows how our interview partners were linked to their absent fathers within their family (and henceforth socially) instead of to their mothers. One can also trace a linkage between racist views and the dominance of the paternal mindset when appearances such as the color of skin are used to mark con lai Mỹ as ›ngoại‹ within the public sphere. Interviews show that *ethnicity* and *race* are dominating categories when speaking of discrimination in Vietnam. Especially Black con lai Mỹ have faced discrimination, while children of White American soldiers could more easily pass as ›Vietnamese‹, and are thus far less often the target of social prejudices in public areas. An interesting outlook for this research could be an investigation of Vietnam's experiences of racism and White hegemony under French and US dominance, and incorporations of such colonial ideas into Confucian concepts of the family and kinship in Vietnam. Until further research in the field can shed light on such pending questions, an interim result of the data is that – counter to widespread assumption – con lai Mỹ and their mothers are seldom confronted with accusations that label them as political traitors, imperialists or children of the enemy. Rather, intersecting categories linked to race, family, gender relations and class status lie at the core of discriminatory practices against con lai Mỹ.

References

DeBonis, Steven: *Children of the Enemy. Oral Histories of Vietnamese Amerasians and Their Mothers.* McFarland: London 1995.

Frey, Marc: *Geschichte des Vietnamkriegs. Die Tragödie in Asien und das Ende des amerikanischen Traums*. C.H. Beck: München 2004.

Gastambide, Remy: "Staub des Lebens Die schwarzen ‚Amerasians' von Vietnam". In: Haus der Kulturen der Welt (ed.): *Gap Viet Nam*. Selbstverlag: Berlin 1999, pp. 102–103.

Großheim, Martin: "Erinnerungsdebatten in Vietnam". In: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (ed.): *APuZ Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 27/2008. Sozietäts-Verlag: Berlin 2008, pp. 19–25.

Hà, Kien Nghi: *Vietnam Revisited. Demokratisierung, nationale Identität und adoleszente Arbeitsmigration*. Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Berlin: Berlin 2005.

Hall, Stuart: "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In: Rutherford, Jonathan (ed.): *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference*. Lawrence and Wishart: London 1990, pp. 222–237.

Hall, Stuart: "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance." In: Baker, Huston A. Jr.; Diawara, Manthia; Lindeborg, Ruth H. (eds.): *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, London 1996, pp. 16–61.

Maxner, Stephen: "Vietnam und USA." In: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (ed.): *APuZ Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 27/2008. Sozietäts-Verlag: Berlin 2008, pp. 25–32.

McKelvey, Robert S.: *The Dust of Life – America's Children Abandoned in Vietnam.* University of Washington Press: Seattle, London 1999.

Neale, Jonathan: *A People's History of the Vietnam War.* The New Press: New York, London 2001.

Nguyễn, Kien: *The Unwanted – A Memoir of Childhood*. Back Bay Books: New York, Boston, London 2001.

Sachs, Dana: *The Life We Were Given: Operation Babylift. International Adoption, and the Children of War in Vietnam*. Beacon Press: Boston 2010.

SarDesai, D.R.: *Vietnam – The Struggle for National Identity.* Westview Press: San Francisco, Los Angeles 1992.

Yarborough, Trin: *Surviving Twice: Amerasian Children of the Vietnam War.* Potomac Books Inc.: Washington 2005.

Harald Weydt

(Frankfurt/Oder)

Linguistic borders – language conflicts. Pleading for recognition of their reality.

Abstract: Schon bei oberflächlicher Betrachtung zeigt sich, dass Sprachgrenzen und Konfliktlinien in engem Zusammenhang stehen und weitgehend zusammenfallen. Wir möchten das Konfliktpotenzial, das Sprachunterschieden innewohnt, als eine unausweichlich auftretende Gefahr charakterisieren, die quasi automatisch aus dem Sprachgegensatz entsteht, als eine vorfindliche Realität. Damit stehen wir im Gegensatz zu Interpretationen, die Sprachkonflikte als unverständlich auffassen, allenfalls als künstlich von oben oder außen geschürt. Zwei solcher Sichtweisen werden kurz angesprochen: der marxistische Ansatz und eine jüngere Variante; letztere reduziert Sprachgrenzen und die sich daraus ergebenden Folgen auf rein mentale Konstruktionen, die typischerweise von Eliten instrumentalisiert werden. Gegenüber solchen Auffassungen behaupten wir, dass Sprachkonflikte als reale Fakten anerkannt und ernst genommen werden müssen. Erst wenn man die Natur von Sprachunterschieden versteht, wenn man den Prozess erkennt, in dem Konflikte entstehen, und wenn man sich vor Augen führt, wie sie die Harmonie zusammenlebender Gruppen bedrohen, erst dann kann man Wege finden, das Konfliktrisiko zu minimieren und sogar die Vorteile sprachlicher Vielfalt zum Wohl der Gemeinschaft entfalten

Schlagworte: Sprachkonflikte verstehen- Konfliktpotential – sprachliche Vielfalt – Sprachkontakt

Keywords: Linguistic diversity – conflict potential – understanding language conflicts – language contact

1. (Mis)Understanding language conflicts

In the course of my life, I have experienced many ethnic and linguistic conflicts. It was particularly in the time when I taught in Montréal at the French-speaking *Université de Montréal* from 1969 to 1971 that I could see up close the arguments and actions of the people of Québec. These occasionally violent events prepared me for perceiving conflicts; in the ensuing time period, I was able to see linguistic tensions, hostilities and political dissents where other people – above all people from outside and especially people from monolingual states – would not have seen them. I saw that the world was far from being linguistically peaceful. I am personally most influenced by the situations I experienced in the province of Québec, Kazakhstan, (Kirgizstan, Tadzhikistan), Belgium and Catalonia. In addition, my

perception was sharpened because I found very often myself in a minority situation, where all the people around me spoke their mother tongue and did not care much about me. There, I was exposed to the situation that a minority non-native speaker undergoes every day: I experienced how easily you can be overlooked, and how difficult it is to be taken seriously as an equal partner.

In the areas with ethnic/linguistic conflicts, I took great interest in understanding what happened. Most of the time I had friends on both sides of the conflicts; at the very least, I found people who explained their points of view to me. One concomitant question that I never let out of my mind was how one could mitigate or solve these conflicts. Another question I asked myself and the people involved was how and why these tensions and conflicts between the groups had arisen. I must underline that I came to know my discussion partners on both sides as people who were personally peaceful, just, and considerate. I further admit that in most of the cases, I could perfectly understand both sides and would have been able to defend and to explain their cases to others. This impression stands in blatant contrast to the bitterness of the linguistic conflicts in which they were involved. The contradiction between the amiable and peaceful character of these people and their intransigent behavior gives rise to a widespread astonishment, and is probably one of the sources of misunderstanding. Brubaker and many sociolinguists conclude that these people (speaking mostly of members of minorities such as Hungarians in Romania, in the days of Russians of the Crimea and in the Ukraine) are seduced, incited, exploited, and misled by leaders. "Here, as elsewhere, the protagonists of the conflict have been organizations, not groups." (Brubaker 2002, p. 179).

2. Groups

Ethnic groups are a subset of groups. Groups can have other foundations than ethnicity. There are even groups that come into existence without showing particular features – except that their members belong to the same group.

Groups without characteristics
Sherif's experiments: As early as in the late 40s and early 50s of the last century, Muzafer Sherif, professor at Oklahoma State University who had immigrated from Turkey, conducted his famous "summer camp experiments".

1st Phase: Boys were split into two equal different camps, contrary to existing friendships.
2nd phase: They developed a very narrow intensive consciousness of a *we*-group.

3rd phase: They developed a consciousness of superiority towards the other group, they liked competition against the other group, and there were even acts of group specific aggressiveness.

4th phase: both groups could be reconciled if they saw:

- a common enemy,
- common needs (like lack of water),
- shared advantages,
- friends they had in common.

This example shows prototypically the origin of groups and of group conflicts. Note that these groups were composed of members who had nothing in common with what is normally attributed to a group: they had not known each other before, had no common history that could be invoked, nor did they share common economic interests, values nor any beliefs that would incite opposition toward the other group. New conflicts came into being almost automatically; no leaders incited them.

School classes:

The next example of this category are classes of high school students belonging to the same class. Most German readers might know such groups, who, many decades after their *Abitur*[1], still gather in celebration of its anniversary. In other countries, "*homecoming events*" are also very popular. Again, the respective class members don't share any characteristics beyond belonging to the same school class. In most of these classes, one can find great internal differences in parents' wealth, predilection for certain subjects (mathematics, sports, literature), there are good students and those who are not quite so good, and they have diverse political opinions. It is interesting to see that such groups establish their own distinct identities. Teachers confirm that they like class A, find class B boring, class C interesting and so on. The groups persist, often for their entire lifetimes.

These two examples underline that, in order to come into being, to persist, and to compete with others, groups need neither leaders nor commonly shared features that oppose them to other groups.

3. Language Conflicts

But this is not to say that all group borders are arbitrary and insignificant. There are indeed defining borders based on features that are very important for the groups and for their survival.

---

1   Abitur: Graduation examination at grammar school required for entry into higher education.

In contrast to the aforementioned holiday camps, school classes and "alumni cohorts" stand linguistic groups, the members of which speak different languages. Linguistic borders are among the most consequential ones, as their members do have a decisive feature in common (namely the usage of a common language) that distinguishes them from other groups.

3. 1. The inferiority of the non-native Speaker

In this discussion, I concentrate on the most frequent type of linguistic conflicts: Two languages, A and B, are spoken in the same region; most speakers of language A are monolinguals, though some may have limited proficiency in B; on the other hand, almost all speakers of B are bilinguals. As a consequence, the speakers of A are privileged in two respects (see 3.1.1 and 3.1.2).

3.1.1 Profession and public life.

As it is extremely difficult and rare that people maintain their mother language at a satisfying level while simultaneously developing a high level of language proficiency in another language, the non-native B speakers will be less perfect in A, though they have to invest much more time and energy into learning it. Their imperfect proficiency will hinder them decisively in many respects, of which only some selected examples will be given.

– B speakers do worse in job interviews,
– they need much more time to write ambitious texts, including proposal writing (and they still need editors),
– they will be less convincing on the telephone or in business conferences.
– They will read more slowly and with a lesser degree of quick and exact understanding.
– The same holds for their oral understanding, above all when there is background noise or when the discourse is dialectally influenced.

3.1.2 Discourse structures.

Much more subtle are the disadvantages that B speakers have to face on the conversational level. To enumerate only some of the ordinary non-native's handicaps, he/she:

– faces word-finding problems, i.e. he as more difficulties than his partners in finding adequate expressions and grammatical constructions for what he wants to say,

- must – besides thinking of the content of his speech – permanently control and monitor his correctness in grammar, idiomaticity, and vocabulary, an effort that absorbs a great part of his intellectual potential.
- The non-native speaker, struggling with the foreign language, is aware of his own deficiencies; he recognizes his partner's superior command of the language, which weakens him in defending his own position.
- In the turn-taking game, he gets fewer turns. As he speaks slowly and hesitates while searching for his words, the others tend to interrupt him easily.
- He is much less fluent and eloquent.
- He can do little to work on his own face or on that of his partner – or at least considerably less than the native speaker.
- His turns are not linked to the preceding ones, so that his counterparts assume that their content has been accepted, as they were not contradicted.
- Contradiction, if necessary, requires great effort and the speaker has to be prepared for a certain amount of conflict.
- Very often, B speakers will have to suffer from the native speakers' patronizing attitudes, for example when they help them when they search for words, or when they correct their oral utterances.
- His competence in establishing compromises is very limited, i. e. in establishing them and following through with them. He has to work with a sledgehammer instead of a scalpel, so to speak. –
- In short: for B speakers, it is more difficult to contradict the preceding turn without struggle.

Here, I would like to introduce a striking example of the non-native speakers' inferiority. It stems from an experience at an international congress which took place in Lyon (France) in 1994, a sociologists' and social workers' congress, with the title *"Quartiers en danger", "Endangered neighborhoods"*, organized by the *European Community*. There were two admitted conference languages, French and English, and there were simultaneous translations from each of these languages into the other. The first day of the conference and the morning of the second one was devoted to working groups. Each working group determined one person for the task of reporting the results to the plenary session. The participants were more than happy that they could pass this job to the native speakers[2]. On the second day, a *Plenary Session* was held where speakers of each working group presented

---

2   There was one exception, a German woman. I saw her writing her report word-for-word, while all the others enjoyed their leisure time.

their results and discussed them with the audience. I kept record of the discussion in just noting

– the country that the speaker represented,
– the language used (French or English),
– the lengths of the contributions in minutes and seconds.

For example: 3) *F, f, 2:35* would mean: '*Third speaker, French native speaker, French language, two minutes and 35 seconds*'. The discussion went as follows:

1) I (Irish) e 3:15; – 2) F f 2:50, – 3) P (Portuguese) e 0:15; – 4) E e 4:16 (relaxed, eloquent and humorous); – 5) G (Greek) e 0:10; – It f 0:34; and so on, and so on.[3]

It costs the non-native speakers quite some will power to rise to speak. The audience did not give much attention to their stammered contributions.

Anyone can observe that similar events happen very often in international public debates, and she/he will realize that the native speakers have much longer turns; their utterances are more convincing, wittier, and it is more fun to listen to them.

As the reports they made emphasized their own view, the natives controlled the plenary session much more than the non-francophone or the non-anglophone Europeans.

It goes without saying that the picture would have been completely different if the congress' languages had been, say, Italian and Danish. The Italian and the Danish participants would have dominated the congress; they would have shown great expertise in the subject and would have been admired by everybody for their rhetorical excellence and the humorous and brilliant way of presenting their experiences and ideas. They would have used the floor to expose their ideas. The native speakers of French and English would have been sitting silently in the audience, eaten up by inferiority complexes and would have been unable to contribute to the opinion-forming, let alone to control it.

The constellation of two people who decide on the common language is comparable to that of two friends who decide to go in for sports together; one is, physically and genetically, a marathon runner, the other one is more of a weightlifter. Whoever of these two agrees to take part in the other's sport, is doomed to be forever in an inferior position.

---

3   As I don't have my notes of the conference any longer, which was held 20 years ago, I have invented a prototype of this discussion. It could be reproduced under similar conditions.

3.2 Why and how language conflicts emerge

As people with two high-level mother tongues are extremely rare, the prevailing group holds the so called "definition power" (Esser 1996, p. 80 ff.); the speakers of B face – and they recognize it very clearly and rationally – immense losses in what everybody aspires to: physical well-being, material goods and social esteem. Esser (1996) proposes a gradation of conflicts: On his 6-point scale, the sharpest conflict is the *zero-sum conflict*, where whatever is won by one party is won at the expense of the other. Language conflicts are such null sum conflicts. „The winner takes it all" (*Mamma mia*).

This iniquity is the source and the origin of most, if not all, language conflicts. B speakers perceive their inequality as unjust because they feel that they have to carry the full burden of learning, maintaining, and further developing an additional language, and they know that instead of gaining a reward, they are penalized for their extra effort. –

Not always will this unequal distribution of rights lead to the outburst of an open conflict. Before the B speakers will revolt against their situation, at least two more conditions (a and b) have to be fulfilled. They must consider the situation a) unjust and b) changeable.

A schema, modified from Giles/Bourhis/Taylor's well-known article on group behavior (1977, table 3, p. 332), shows a cluster of four cells (A – D).

Figure 1: Feelings of the B-group towards the fairness and the changeability of the situation (modified from Giles/Bourhis/Taylor 1977)

	felt as justified ("legitimate")	felt as unjust ("non legitimate")
Changeable ("cognitive alternatives perceived")	**1** **(unstable, ?)**	**2** **outburst of conflict possible**
Unchangeable ("no cognitive alternatives perceived")	**3** **accepted, stable**	**4** **unstable**

Cell 1: This case is somewhat problematic and not very common. We may think of indigenous populations who adopt the former colonists' language.

Cell 2: This is the field where conflicts burst out. Good examples are the Baltic nations after acquiring independence. They had always felt that the Russians imposed their language and way of life upon them, and considered this as very unjust. When they acquired their independence, they reintroduced their respective languages in their countries as privileged means of communication. The same

holds for Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tadzhikistan, as I have person-ally observed, but also in Georgia.

Ukraine: The most recent example of a global crisis caused to a large extent by language conflict is the situation in Ukraine. February 2nd 2014, two days after the pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovych, had tried to flee from Ukraine as a consequence of the "Maidan Revolution" (or "Euromaidan"), and days before the parliament elected a new president (Jazenjuk), the Parliament decided to repeal the language law of 2012 (Law "On the principles of the state language policy"). This law guaranteed the Russian language an official status, together with Ukrainian. As a consequence of this amendment, Russian would lose its status as co-official language. Although this amendment was immediately vetoed by the acting president of Ukraine, Oleksandr Turchynov, it caused an uproar among the ethnic Russian population, and especially in the Eastern parts of the Ukraine, including the Crimea. This factor contributed to the outbreak of a political crisis[4]. On June 29th, 2014, however, the new president, Petro Poroshenko, reversed the repeal, declaring that "The only official language of Ukraine was, is, and will be the Ukrainian language" (*German Press Agentur* (dpa) from: *Der Tagesspiegel*, Berlin, June 30th, 2014[5]), a statement that will make it very difficult for the Rus-sian population of Ukraine to accept peace conditions. The linguistic aspect of the conflict seems to me to be underestimated in foreign politics and in the media.

Belgium is another relevant example. Both of Belgium's main linguistic regions, Wallonia and Flanders, consider the other side's demand to abstain from using their own language for intra-national communication as very unfair. Since the beginning of the 20th Century, the country has undergone major alterations: the state, culturally and economically dominated by speakers of Walloon (French), developed into a country whose majority speaks Flemish and has become eco-nomically dominant, while the capital, Brussels, has become francized. The lin-guistic tensions between the two regions make the country almost ungovernable. Belgium has been without a government for quite some time. The Flemings insist on equal rights for both languages, and as the Walloons refuse to speak Flemish, the Flemings decline to use French. If a third language has to be used, English, the Flemish are privileged because of the linguistic similarities between English and Flemish.

---

4   Comment of *The Christian Science Monitor* (*Febr. 28, 2014)*: "The [adoption of this bill] only served to infuriate Russian-speaking regions, [who] saw the move as more evidence that the antigovernment protests in Kiev that toppled Yanukovich's govern-ment were intent on pressing for a nationalistic agenda."

5   This story occurred on the day I wrote this.

Another example seems to be the situation in Romania described by Brubaker (2002), namely the Hungarian-speaking minority, Cluj-based and organized in the DAHR (*Democratic Association of Hungarians of Romania*) in conflict with the Romanian nationalist parties. Brubaker interprets this conflict as being instigated by elites (especially the Romanian nationalistic mayor of Cluj Funar on one side and the Democratic Association of Hungarians of Romania on the Hungarian side) and their organizations. Whether this is an unprejudiced interpretation is doubtful. It could be influenced by an idealistic a priori conviction that there is primarily interethnic harmony which is disturbed from above. Contemporary witnesses of the Romanian situation tell a different story. The German singer Peter Maffay was raised in Borsov (Kronstadt, Romania). The following excerpt from his biography is illustrative:

> „Ab dem 10. Lebensjahr, um 1959, nahmen die Prügeleien zu, radikalisierten sich die Einstellungen: rumänische Jugendliche gegen deutsche Jugendliche, deutsche Jugendliche gegen ungarische Jugendliche und andersrum. Jeder gegen jeden, und eigentlich wusste niemand genau warum überhaupt. Oder doch! Da die Eltern unter dem System litten, erschien es den Kindern wie ein Akt stillschweigender Solidarität, auf der Straße ebenfalls unmissverständlich ihre Meinung zu sagen – egal, in welcher Sprache. Messerstechereien waren bald an der Tagesordnung, insbesondere, wenn Ungarn beteiligt waren. Auch wenn zunächst nur bedroht wurde, gab es in späteren Jahren häufig Verletzte. Wenn der Musiker Maffay bis in die Gegenwart stets ein Klappmesser in der Hosentasche bei sich trägt, stammte diese Angewohnheit aus jener Zeit."[6] (Harsch/Maffay 2009, p. 25)

This is definitely not a conflict evoked by authorities. – Cell 2 contains cases such as the aforementioned French-speaking Quebecois and the other French-speaking minorities in other provinces of Canada. In Spain, only after Franco's death language rights were openly claimed, as – in the Catalans' understanding – the moment for change and for claiming their rights and even independence had come. One could cite as further examples the languages of former Yugoslavia, for example the separation of the mainly Albanian-speaking Kosovo.

---

6   From his 10th year onwards, the fighting increased and the attitudes became more radical: Romanian youngsters against German youngsters, German youngsters against Hungarian youngsters, and vice versa. Everybody against everybody, and nobody really knew exactly why at all. Or did they? As the parents suffered under the system, for the children it was an act of tacit solidarity to unambiguously assert their opinion in the streets, in whatever language. Stabbing became quite frequent, in particular when Hungarians were involved. While at the beginning there were mostly threats, in later years injuries occurred frequently. The fact that, up to now, the musician Maffay always carries a switchblade in his pocket stems from that time (own translation, H. W.).

Cell 3: The cases that belong in Cell 3 are quite unproblematic. B speakers migrating into a monolingual state, for example Europeans who nowadays emigrate to the United States. They know in advance that the language of their new country is English and that they have to learn it. There is nothing they can do about it, they agree with it and they do not perceive it as unfair.

Cell 4 represents the numerous cases where the non-native speakers don't think that the situation can be changed. This was the case for Kazakhstan at the time of the Soviet Union. As many Kazakhs resigned and accepted their fate as inevitable, Kazakhstan became the most russified non-Russian Republic of the Soviet Union, an attitude which changed after the decline of the Soviet Empire. The Kazakhs moved toward cell 2.

This systematization is still too schematic; to be accurate, the values should be represented as continua rather than binary dichotomies.

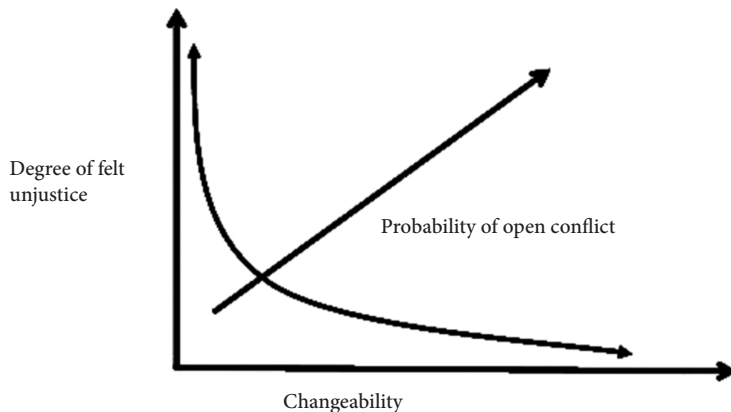More adequate would be this presentation:

Figure 2

Figure 2 takes into account the gradual character of the parameters: in the view of the people involved, a situation can be more or less just, and the chance of bringing about a change can be higher or lower.

Linguistic conflicts can be sharpened. This happens regularly when linguistic borders coincide with other borders – with lines that separate religions or with lines that divide economic classes. One example is the Province of Québec, where traditionally the speakers of French are Catholics and relatively poor, less educated and traditional, while English speaking Protestants or Jewish Anglophones are much wealthier, more educated and more progressively-minded. In Belgium, the

economic situation has been reversed: in recent decades, the economic power has shifted from Wallonia to Flanders, a change which is difficult for the Walloons to accept.

3.3. Explanations we don't believe in

A short look at explanations we don't believe in:

The history of linguistic thinking offers three typical and influential examples.

First: the myth of the building of the tower of Babel. A wrathful God sent humanity the curse of diglossia as a punishment for their haughtiness. This suspicion towards the coexistence of several languages was – at least in part – revoked in the event of Pentecost, where God conferred upon future missionaries the ability to speak foreign languages.

Second: The Marxist tradition contains the idea that multilingualism is an impediment to progress. Pure Marxist ideology considers history a process of vertical conflicts, the driving force being the struggle of the classes, a conflict from bottom to top and vice versa. Logically, vertical lines that separate nations, languages, cultures, and religions are all negligible; whoever takes them seriously into consideration in politics is somewhat backward and reactionary[7], this in spite of the fact that the Soviet Union was, in its self-concept, a multicultural and multiethnic state (Rom-Sourkowa 2004). In the former Soviet Union, I met old people who would still tell you that it was very dangerous if documents written in the Arabic language were found in their house.

In both examples (Babel and Marxism), the idea of natural harmony in monolingual societies is central; disturbance of this harmony is seen as a fall of mankind, a punishment or as an unfair and reactionary act.

In monolingual societies, the animosity against serious coexistence of languages is widespread. There is a chorus of outrage like: "How is it possible that in our century there are still these chauvinist people who don't want to speak the common language and who make a lot of fuss about their language", together with the self-praise of being very tolerant like: "We do not want to prevent them from speaking their language. Let them speak what they want at home, but when speaking with us, they should be understandable".

---

7   Remember that Max Weber (1922) predicted that the evolution of modern societies would entail a weakening of ethnic communities and so contribute to dissipate ethnic conflicts, an unfulfilled prophecy. See Popova (in print).

On the side of monolingualism are peace, harmony and progress; on the side of diglossia are guilt, disturbance and culprits.

Third: In line with these conceptions there is a mainstream of modern sociolinguistic approaches. One representative is Brubaker; he describes language conflicts as initiated by elites, by persuaders, by chauvinist culprits. Adherents take for granted that conflicts are caused by troublemakers, and do not even consider the idea that linguistic conflicts emerge from a highly unfair distribution of rights and chances, and that they can be mitigated.

4. How can linguistic conflicts be avoided?

As coexistence of languages tends to lead to tensions, one must try (to speak in Esser's 1996 terms) to convert the resulting zero-sum conflicts into lower level conflicts. One must try to distribute the costs of language differences to both sides.

An important first step, maybe the most important one, is to wake up the A speakers' awareness of the immense costs the B speakers encounter in interlingual communication. In other words: it is necessary to convince the A speakers of the costs that B speakers face if they use language A in their common conversation. I have often observed a complete lack of awareness of the imposition, for example in the Anglophone community in Québec, in the Francophone community in Belgium, in Russophone communities in the former Soviet republics, among Spaniards in Catalonia and in the Basque provinces. The A speakers argue:

– it is so much easier to communicate in A as everybody speaks it,
– speakers of A have – most unfortunately – less talent for foreign languages and are therefore unable to learn B,
– in contrast to A, language B is so complicated that it is practically impossible to learn,
– the practical value of B is so limited that the discrepancy of costs and achievement forbids one to learn it,
– besides: nobody forbids speaking B. At home and in private surroundings, everybody is free to speak it: "Let them speak what they want".
– The costs of bilingualism are too high.

There can't be a solution as long as there is no awareness. As a general rule: *To tone down the conflict, compromises must be agreed upon*.

There is a wide range:

– Bilingualism as a precondition for eligible positions as a good incentive (see South Tirol),

– acquisition of the other language as an important school subject,
– high weight of language proficiency in the other language in high school graduation exams,
– equal recognition of certificates in both languages,
– creation and maintenance of public and private esteem for the minority language,
– above all: cultural and social recognition of bilingualism,
– establishment of regions of different linguistic dominance.

One can also refer to the fact that learning the less prestigious language brings advantages which are often not thought of. Walloons who learn Flemish will have considerable advantages when acquiring the more important Germanic languages English and German (and in general other foreign languages); learning French, the Canadian Anglophones gain access not only to the Francophone areas in Europe and overseas, but also to the gigantic Spanish-speaking and Portuguese-speaking territories because of the common lexical, morphological and syntactic features of the Romance languages.

5. Prospects

It should be in the interest of all parties involved to prevent linguistic conflicts and to avoid their negative consequences. However – apart from calculating the political necessity – there is an ethical aspect that should not be concealed. Learning, speaking and using a foreign language is much more than a rational decision intended to assure maximum political profit. Those who use languages that are not their mother tongues open their views, leave their narrow perspective behind, they demonstrate respect and solidarity for others, for the variety of cultures and ways of expression. They receive a double reward.

Literature:

Brubaker, Rogers: "Ethnicity without groups". *Arch.Europ. Sociology*: XLIII, 2, 2002, pp. 163–189.

Elwert, Georg: "Nationalismus und Ethnizität: Über die Bildung von Wir-gruppen". *Kölner Zs. F. Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* , Jg. 41. H.3, 1989 , pp. 440–464.

Campbell, Donald T.: "Ethnocentric and other altruistic motives". In: Levine, David (ed.): *Nebraska symposium on motivation.* University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln 1965, pp. 283–311.

Esser, Hartmut: "Ethnische Konflikte als Auseinandersetzungen um den Wert von kulturellem Kapital". In: Heytmeyer, Wilhelm / Dollnase, Reiner (eds.): *Die*

bedrängte Toleranz. Ethnische Konfklikte, religiöse Differenzen und die Gefahren politischer Gewalt. Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a. Main 1996, pp. 63–92.

Giles, Howard / Bourhis, Richard Y. / Taylor, Donald M: "Towards a Theory of Language in Ethnic Group Relations". In: Howard Giles (ed.): *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations.* Academic Press: London 1977, pp. 307–348.

Hansen, Georg / Spetsmann-Kunkel, Martin: *Integration und Segregation – Ein Spannungsverhältnis.* Waxmann: Münster – New York – München – Berlin 2008.

Hartsch, Edmund: *Maffay – Auf dem Weg zu mir.* Bertelsmann: München 2009.

Hofstätter, Peter R.: *Gruppendynamik. Kritik der Massenpsychologie.* Rowohlt: Hamburg 1957.

Kotthoff, Helga: "Lernersprachliche und interkulturelle Ursachen für kommunikative Irritationen". *Linguistische Berichte* 135, 1991, pp. 375–397.

Krüger, Diane: «Quand le lion a commencé à rugir». *L'identité flamande et la Première Guerre Mondiale.* MA-Thesis, Europa-Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder) 2004. Unpublished.

Popova, Ekaterina: *Sprachen und interethnische Beziehungen in Estland in der Umbruchszeit* (Diss. Europa-Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt Oder). (in print)

Rom-Sourkova, Olga: *Die sprachliche Situation in der Russischen Föderation: Gesetzgebung und Wirklichkeit.* BWV, Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2004.

Sherif, Muzafer: *The Psychology of Social Norms.* Harper: Oxford, England 1936.

Sherif, Muzafer et al.: *Intergroup conflict and cooperation: The robbers cave experiment.* University of Oklahoma Book Exchange: Norman 1961.

Nassim, Nicholas Taleb: *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder.* Random House: New York 2012.

Tajfel, Henri: "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict". In: Austin, Wiliam. G. / Worchel, Stephen (eds.) *The social Psychology of Intergroup Relations.* Brooks/Cole: Monterrey, California 1979, pp. 33 – 47.

Tajfel, Henri: *Gruppenkonflikt und Vorurteil. Entstehung und Funktion sozialer Stereotypen. Mit einem Vorwort von Wolfgang Stroebe.* Huber: Bern / Stuttgart / Wien 1982.

Weber, Max: *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.* Mohr: Tübingen 1922.

Weydt, Harald: "The Principle of Equal Effort and its Role in Language Conflicts – Canada, Khazakhstan and Europe". *Revue Education et Sociétés Bilingues 3,* Dezember 1997, pp. 69 – 80.

Weydt, Harald: "Welche Sprachen in den europäischen Institutionen? (Kiun lingvon en la europaj institucioj?)". *Internationale Zeitschrift für Modellierung und Mathematisierung in den Humanwissenschaften 39,* Heft 2, Juni 1998, pp. 69–80.

Weydt, Harald: "Pourquoi les conflits linguistiques?". In: Weydt, Harald (ed.): *Langue – Communauté – Signification. Approches en Linguistique Fonctionnelle.* Lang: Frankfurt am Main et al. 2002, pp. 39–47.

Weydt, Harald: "The Inferiority of the Non-native Speaker and its Political Consequences". In: Ryan, Phyllis M. / Terborg, Roland (eds.): *Language: Issues of Inequality.* Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México 2003, pp. 172–188.

Weydt, Harald: "Le choix de langues scolaires dans une région bilingue. L'exemple de Kazaquestane". In: Feuillard, Colette (ed.): *Créoles – Langages et Politiques linguistiques.* Lang: Frankfurt am Main et al. 2004, pp. 315–321.

Weydt, Harald: "Sprachkonflikte – unvermeidlich aber beherrschbar?" In: Jańczak, Barbara / Jungbluth, Konstanze / Weydt, Harald (eds.): *Mehrsprachigkeit aus deutscher Perspektive.* Narr: Tübingen 2012, pp. 9–29.

Weydt, Harald (forthcoming): *"Sprache oder Dialekt?"*