Minority Rights and Minority Identities
- Sámi in Finland and Sorbs in Germany

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Abstract

This paper deals with international minority rights and their meaning as an identity resource for ethnic minorities. It asks why small national groups, such as the Sámi and the Sorbs, have not vanished, as was prophesied by modernisation theorists. In fact, the opposite has occurred. In Europe, small national minority groups are now clearly gaining more opportunities to invent their own "national" policies. After a short introduction that provides some general background, I discuss some common definitions of minority rights and the specific meaning of 'minority identity' used in this paper. Then, I show how minority rights and minority identities are linked to each other, and why and how international minority protection treaties have become a part of the everyday vocabulary of Sámi, Sorb and many other national movements. The examples I use originate mostly from my field studies with the Sorbs in Eastern Germany and the Sámi in Northern Finland. I argue that not only the image of the group projected to its members is influenced by these treaties, but that the definition of the group itself is also changed.

Keywords: Minority rights, politics of identity, national minorities, Sámi, Sorbs.

Mimesis as Cultural Survival[1]

The project of nation-states is a never-ending repetition of itself, a compulsive mimesis of ideals that cannot be lived up to. The hegemonic nation-states include everybody in the process of the mimicry, since hegemonic ideals can never really be separated from what they exclude and what they limit. This inclusion implies that the hegemonic and non-hegemonic (the "outcast" of nation-state ideology) are always discursively dependent upon each other. The members of hegemonic nation-states are, in this discourse, as important as those who are not allowed to become members. This implies, too, that minorities and majorities are equally important components of the system of the nation-state. The ideals and goals of a nation-state are constantly reinforced through a continual display of power symbols, which all members and non-members of a state understand as signs of decision power. In essence, the hegemonic ideals of the nation-state entail suppression and forcing-to-be-silent to make the creation of the nation-state possible. Take, for example, democracies that were established through non-democratic decisions or national cultures that could only emerge after multifarious local cultures were exterminated.

National cultures are based on an ideal of eliminating difference or transforming difference into a form that is considered harmless to the construction of the state. Thus, those who represent difference (i.e. suppressed elements, outcasts, non-members) can use mimesis as an identity-building strategy. The mimetic "taking-off" can be seen as adaptation: a stranger seems to learn the way to become "one-of-us". If the "stranger" is seen as somebody trying to adapt, she is often seen as harmless and it becomes easier for the members of a hegemonic state to accept this person. The hegemonic environment in which the stranger is living decides what kind of adaption is reasonable (Adorno and Horkheimer 1947). The adaption to hegemonic ideals is, inevitably, always mimetic because everybody moves in the same discursive field - those who have power, as well as those who have not. The "have-nots" must use the same "dominant" means, and follow the same "dominant" goals, if they are aiming to get out of their meek position and find a way to become visible in their societies.

Thus mimesis is a strategy of cultural survival. The strategy of cultural survival results in copying the hegemonic norm (Bell 1999). Through the mimetic process, minorities and migrants become a part of society. They start to adapt their cultural self-identification to the norm of the (dominant) state culture. This process always implies an imitation of the "anatomy" of the nation-state. Individuals not belonging to the dominant group can find a chance of survival in the mimesis of nation-building. For example, minorities imitate the organisational structures of the state, take on the official understanding of political representation and simulate in their own organisations the institu-

[1] This subtitle originates from a magnificent article written by Vikki Bell on Judith Butler and Anti-Semitism. Her work has inspired me in my thoughts about mimicry. See Bell 1999.

tional structures of a dominant nation. At the same time, also as a part of the process of mimesis, the ones not belonging to the dominant culture develop a canon of their own cultural symbols and resources that follow the same logic as the dominant symbols and resources. Like the representatives of a nation-state, spokespersons of the minority determine the value and hierarchy of ethnic and cultural features. The kind of mimesis I have described here does not have to be an active and conscious process.

Do minority groups like the Sorbs and the Sámi need to imitate the process of nation-state building in order to be able to claim successfully to be a real national, cultural and/ or ethnic minority and eligible for minority protection? My analysis supports the assumption that this process of imitation is the strategy most readily accepted by states like Finland and Germany, and by other states and interstate organisations, such as the European Union. My study indicates that minority activists are forced to choose the kind of nationalist strategies that became very popular at the beginning of the 20th century, if they want to determine the contents of the definition of their minority identity successfully. The strategy of mobilising a minority with ethnic and national arguments is even supported by many European states, and the tendencies to homogenise a minority into "a nation" are implicitly enforced by many interstate organisations.

International Minority Rights

Legal conceptions and ways of thinking form a structuring element for the field of the political action of cultural minorities. International conventions and measures define political discourses, both directly and indirectly. Minority activists frequently refer to existing international minority rights treaties. Many practice-orientated guidebooks are published, aiming to help minority activists claim "their rights" in a correct way. *Indigenous Peoples, The United Nations and Human Rights,* edited by Sarah Pritchard, was published in 1998. This work was explicitly addressed to the activists of indigenous movements. The back cover declares: "This important book is a guide to how indigenous peoples' groups can access the UN system". In this and many other guidebooks, minority activists can learn how to formulate their arguments and define their policies in order to join the international minority rights system.

International minority rights have a long and complex history. The first European "minority problems" were connected to religious differences (Kimminich 1985; Scherer-Leydecker 1997: 30). Nevertheless, confessional questions were strongly related to the political atmosphere of the day (Pernthaler 1980: 10). The exclusively confessional treaties were expanded first during the processes of nation building, which led to an interaction between national and international rights. The first protection treaty established in favour of a national minority is found in Article 1(2) of the Final Resolution of Vienna (*Wiener Schlußakte*) from the year 1815. This treaty aimed to protect the Polish

nation, its *national representation* and *own institutions*, under Prussian, Russian and Austrian rule (Oxenknecht 1988: 112; Stopp 1994: 16).

The term "national minority" was adopted into the vocabulary of international law immediately after the First World War with the new minority protection treaties in which the equation "state is nation, and nation is state" could not be accomplished (Oxenknecht 1988: 112). The "Wilson Doctrine" provided, in principle, rights for all groups considered to be 'nations'. The League of Nations, which was constituted in 1920, worked intensively on a design for group rights. These minority protection conventions have to be seen as compensation for the fact that after the war, new states with new leading "nations" came into existence (Gálantai 1992). Helgesen (1988: 64) talks about the total failing of minority protection during the era of the League of Nations. However, the minority protection system of the inter-war period had positive effects. In general, it was very important that the parties to the agreement acknowledged the existence of minorities on their territories, at least in principle (Stopp 1994: 21). These group rights did not survive the Second World War. This time, there was almost no involvement for group rights. After all, group rights were seen as one part of the crisis constellation of the Second World War and as one of the reasons for the long-lasting conflicts in the inter-war era in Eastern and Central Europe. In its new setting, international law was seen strictly as regulation of individual rights. The individual would enjoy equality with all peoples, and would be able to make use of fundamental freedoms and duties. The only article that included group rights was the right to self-determination as the basis of modern international law.[2]

Today, international minority treaties not only strive to combat the escalation of conflicts along ethnic borders, but also discrimination against minorities and - this important for my analysis - work to support the cultural survival of ethnic minorities (Priesnitz 1994). During recent years, many working groups and initiatives have worked to renew the minority rights agenda and to form new kinds of rights: In 1992, the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, and the Council of Europe adopted the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1992 and the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities in 1995. Almost all European states side clearly with minority cultures. Different cultures and languages are seen as a part of the European heritage, a heritage which, for many years, was ignored.

International minority rights are important because they protect minority groupings from oppression on the part of their own governments. At the same time, these rights offer important guidelines for states to adjust their national laws and policies. These rights aim to force states to give their minorities the support they need to exist. As is

[2] Myntti (1995: 137-139) stresses that self-determination is in principle a universal right, but that the International Community does not recognise the self-determination of indigenous nations, or national, ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities, in practice. Until now, only sovereign states have enjoyed the right to self-determination.

generally the case with cultural matters, a great deal of state support is needed in order to keep a minority group in existence. It is important to understand that there is definitely a need for minority protection. Without an international consensus on this, there is an enormous danger for people who cannot be satisfied with the one and only official national identity that many states embrace.

I have analysed the contents of the definition of a minority in European treaties and conventions elsewhere in greater depth (Toivanen 2001). Implicitly, and sometimes even explicitly, minority rights treaties suppose minorities to share the same language, culture, traditions, belief system and history as other members of that group, and these attributes are supposed to distinguish the group from the major population of the state. To give some examples: a typical formulation found in the UN Minority Rights Declaration (1992) states in Article 1(1) that *"[s]tates shall protect the existence and the national, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories, and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity."* In Resolution 192/1988 of the European Council on Regional and Minority languages, minority languages are defined as follows: *"Languages belonging to the European cultural heritage that are traditionally spoken within a territory by nations of state who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the state's population and different language or languages spoken by the rest of the state's population."* But how do the protection treaties influence the identity politics of minority activists? Maybe not only the image of the group projected to its members might be influenced, but also the definition of the group itself.

The nations cannot - even quantitatively small nations like the Sorbian or the Sámi - be studied by finding primordial continuities or collective feelings: the nation is a practical category of analysis (Brubaker 1996: 21). The Sorbian and the Sámi nations were not born out of themselves. Specific political circumstances are needed to give rise to a "revitalisation" process. I hesitate to use the concept of "revitalisation" as it connotes something old and forgotten that is made lively again, and would therefore like to stress that in this "revitalisation" process, totally new phenomena emerge and are included in the "renewed" concept of national identifications. Even the old meanings of cultural practices are replaced and/or seen and used in new contexts (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). This "comeback" of minority movements cannot be analysed as a result of the internal ontogenesis of a group, even though sociologists and ethnologists sometimes try to make this connection (Esser 1988; O'Leary 1998: 58). I want to call attention to the external factors that cause minority groups to rise (and fall), such as economic resources, political circumstances or decisions made by international institutions. I have in my research concentrated on examining how international minority rights influence the images and contents of the "minority identity" itself and impact the identity struggle of national minorities. I have studied the international treaties in order to find out why it is that so many national minorities in Europe use, in part, precisely the same terminol-

ogy in representing themselves, for example, in their political programmes. I will now explore the concepts of 'minority', 'identity' and 'culture', and continue with a short presentation on Sorbs in Germany and Sámi in Finland.

What Is a Minority Identity?

The concept of a minority has implications that are very often not conscious enough for us. Often, the notion of "minority" simply means a group of persons that shares one language, one religion, and a common ethnic past or culture, and that is smaller in size than another group living in the same state. This kind of definition corresponds to the denotations made in various international minority treaties (see above). In some cases "minority" implies not the smaller size of the group, but its power position. This means that quantitative minorities can build qualitative majorities if they successfully control a larger group.

Kraus (1997) states that "majority" and "minority" are always relational categories. It is very important to pay attention to the fact that the concept of minority mediates political values which should not be adopted without recognising the dynamic relationship between dominant and subordinated groupings or without being aware that the power circumstances between or inside the groups vary all the time. Khleif (1993) uses the concept of "minoritized" to focus on the real life circumstances of the so-called minorities. Khleif emphasises that the fact that minoritized groups do not voluntarily assume the position that implies less power and more economic disadvantages. He remarks that most of them are trying hard to get out of the subordinated status. Berry (1992) uses the notion of "acculturating group" for similar reasons: to show the processual nature of belonging to groups defined as minorities. To conclude, the fundamental difference between majority and minority groups is in their unequal access to economic, social and their so-called "own" cultural resources. The people who have access to these resources only when they are mediated through one or more other groups can be called minorities.

Identity is another difficult and confusing concept. Studies concerning national minorities allude to the notion of identity all the time, because every definition of group or individual always contains identity prescriptions. According to Calhoun (1994: 27), the tension between identity ("putatively singular, unitary and integral") and identities ("plural, crosscutting and divided") is unavoidable. Whenever we talk about groups, like the Sámi or the Sorbs, we strive for one construct. We try to talk about the Sámi as though it were a simple and easy task to set the borders of this identity definition. But even though it might often seem to us that the minority groups are stable and their identity characteristics almost timeless, such an opinion does not stand up to critical inspection. It would of course be tempting to conclude that it is all in the eye of the beholder, that it

is all 'situational', a matter of time and context, shifting, fleeting, illusory (Smith 1986: 2). However, identity is certainly an ongoing process rather than containing fixed characteristics.

Belonging seems to be one of the most important terms in this debate. Belonging to a social group establishes the basis for self-definition. This is how social context has a massive influence on how, and with what values, an individual identifies herself (Deux et al. 1995; Edwards 1985, 132). We know that identity is constructed and reconstructed through endless self-definitions and self-evaluation (Hogg and Abrams 1988; Liebkind 1992). These definitions are influenced and changed through definitions and evaluations made by other people and groups. Deux et al. (1995: 289) say in conclusion that identities are developed and adopted within a common cultural context and as such represent a culturally shared form of social representation. Many authors recognise that it is an impossible task to define a homogeneous social identity (Brown & Williams 1984). Above all, the individual will try to maintain the feeling that she is controlling all the changes in her identification process herself (Mol 1982).

The concept of culture is unavoidable in this debate. Kymlicka (1995: 18) works with a notion of culture synonymous with concepts of "nation" and "a people". By these terms he means an inter-generational community that is more or less institutionalised, that lives in a specific territory, communicates in a certain language, and shares a history. One should be careful with Kymlicka's definition, because one has to keep in mind that cultural groups are not primordial social entities that rest on biological, cultural, linguistic or religious facts (Gurr 1993, 4). Neither are they simply rational associations created to gain access to specific material or political resources. The shared historical experience of being a victim of discrimination and racist action certainly strengthens group identity (Rex 1994) and the awareness of having suffered unfairness collectively clearly nourishes a feeling of belonging together (Bott-Bodenhausen 1996; 1997). I agree that the minority elites can "manipulate" these resentments in their political work on group identity (Horowitz 1985, 66-69), but I do want to stress that they cannot invent these feelings.

Kukathas (1995, 233) emphasises that external factors and, especially, various political institutions play a major role in the formation of modern groups. Culture is, in his view, not that decisive for group identity; culture can be "added" to the identity later on. This is an interesting notion because it proposes that before culture there has to be an elite. The moment this elite has obtained a secure status in society, it may begin to reform, or even to create, a group identity. I do not believe that even Kukathas means that the elite could invent a culture, but they can certainly influence what is represented as "the minority culture" for the wider society. An identity conflict between a minority and the rest of the population is always somewhat artificial in its outset. People who feel that their cultural and social needs are not sufficiently acknowledged or who are oppressed

by the state they are living in, have to find a "point" that makes the differentiation on an ethnic basis reasonable and allows them to mobilise "their" people. Once there are people who have enough power to start recreating "a" people, it is possible to form a democratic elite and to find democratic representatives (Kukathas 1995, 235; Offe 1996). Very often this creation of an elite or activist group is supported by international minority rights which presuppose the existence of a more or less formal representation for each minority (Toivanen 2001). Like Kukathas, Giddens (1991) emphasises the importance of the dominant institutions in the process of determining and strengthening one's identity. The concept of institutional identity emphasises the meaning of various institutions, relevant for all members, as a basis for an identity project. To my understanding, only this concept of identity is useful when looking at people who are struggling for a distinctive and officially recognised identity to find equality. Various relevant institutions set guidelines and borders for the identity formation of a person or a group. The agents construct a specific meaning for institutional establishments and accept these as relevant resources for their identity. In this process of construction, history, biology, productive and reproductive institutions, collective memory and personal fantasies, power constellations, and religious revelations flow together (Castells 1997, 7-12).

In order to be able to act together, ethno-cultural movements have to create and maintain a feeling of belonging amongst their members, and establishing institutions is an effective means of achieving this sentiment. Both the Sorbian and the Sámi organisations are working hard on the democratisation of their representative organs. Only democratically elected delegates have a chance to change the circumstances of their minority, in terms of finding ways to help the group out of a suppressed position. Only if the minority organisations fulfil at least the minimum standards of a democratic organisation, they will be taken seriously in the field of politics, as well as in the eyes of their potential members, the state, and interstate representatives.

To summarise, identity should be seen, in my view, as an ongoing process in which belonging to social groups plays a major role. When a person evaluates the meaning of one specific identification for herself, the different institutions she feels she belongs to or accepts as an important source of self-definition provide her with an orientation on how and with which terms to define her belonging. Even an "inter-generational community" (Kymlicka) does not remain in existence without specific circumstances keeping it existing or helping its "revival". Amongst other resources, various international institutions create specific circumstances for identity support or identity loss. Institutions like UNO, ILO, EU, OSCE or the Council of Europe set and define minority existence and identities through setting and defining minority protection treaties. The political institutions - and I consider minority rights as one kind of political institution - and international organisations, among other external factors, are decisive for minority activists working on identity politics and politics of recognition.

In the next part, I will argue that these minority rights function as guides for minority identities in two ways: directly, as the well known contents of minority protection treaties which, then, are adopted into the minority's own "national programmes", organisational structures, and forms of representation. And, on the other hand, indirectly, through state and communal minority policies that define the space minorities can occupy in the societies and what kind of minorities are accepted as recipients of diverse support programs. My point is to say that these rights create an important resource for the identity politics of minority activists. They are relevant both for what minorities are like and how they have to act.

Who are the Sorbs and the Sámi?

When looking at the identity strategies used by the Sámi movement in Finland and by the Sorbian movement in Germany, it seems quite clear that both identity projects have long and different preceding histories. The differences between the groups are enormous and inevitably meaningful for my study. Even so, my analysis here concentrates on the similarities between these two groups. It is surprising that two different movements use very similar resources and are able to use very similar identity strategies. Now, I will briefly introduce the Sorbian and the Sámi movements.

According to the Sorbian historiographic the **Sorbian minority** has always lived as they still do today, in the area of Lausitz (Lusatia) in the former DDR, in the East of contemporary Germany. Sorbian historical sources show that they already inhabited the Lusatia area before the Germans arrived (Kunze 1995: 9; Kasper 1990, 1991). The Sorbian sources emphasise that the Sorbs are the first inhabitants of what they consider their homelands, and should be seen as aborigines of this area (Mahling 1991: 7; Sorben - Ein kleines Lexikon 1989: 10). Some Sorbian activists would say that their lands have been occupied by the Germans since the 6th century (see also Neustupny 1951). A people called the "Sorbs" did not exist at that time, but there were certainly Sorbian ancestors, Slavic people, living in what is the Eastern part of Germany today. The national minority known as the Sorbs (in German, the "Wenden") was actually created as a by-product of the constitution of the German nation.

The Lausitz is considered a Sorbian homeland, even though the group is in the minority there (Oschlies 1990). The "Historical Dictionary of Contemporary National Movements" (Minahan 1996, 334) tells that Sorbs declared their independence on 1 January 1919, and their territory is settled today by 45 % Sorbs and 55 % Germans as the two "major national groups". According to Sorbian estimates, there are about 60,000 Sorbian people. About 15,000 people have an active knowledge of at least one of the two Sorbian languages (Krüger-Potratz 1991: 87). The greatest number of Sorbs live in two *Bundesländer* - Brandenburg and Saxony. They speak two different Sorbian languages.

The language spoken in Brandenburg is more closely related to Polish, and is called Lower Sorbian. The other language, spoken in Saxony, is related to the Czech language and called Upper Sorbian. All Sorbs speak German (Elle 1995a, 1995b; Spieß 1995). The Sorbian minority movement is strongest in the Catholic areas in Saxony (Walde 1994). The Sorbs enjoy extensive legal protection (Domowina Information 2/1994). Sometimes it is even said that there are more laws to promote Sorbian language and culture than people can make use of: the elite is very small and Sorbian people difficult to find (Interviews DS5). The most important Sorbian organisation is called 'Domowina'. The goal of this organisation is to establish a cultural basis for Sorbian existence that can be used to fight against assimilation on a linguistic and cultural level (Elle 1995a, 475). There is also a variety of smaller Sorbian local organisations and clubs that are mainly subordinate to the Domowina (Stiftung für das sorbische Volk 1994). The minority identity is experienced primarily through these diverse associations. Even though co-operation between the Lower and Upper Sorbian organisations is not without conflicts, to split the minority would mean ending state money and assistance, as Sorbs are, by law, considered to be one national minority. Lower Sorbian activists argue that eventually there may be no speakers of the mother tongue and they worry about preserving their identity should the language be lost (Spieß 1995). In the Catholic areas where Upper Sorbian is spoken, it is still possible to find young people who use Sorbian as their first language. In recent years there have been many attempts in schools and kindergartens to re-activate the Sorbian languages (FAZ 10.8.2000). Altogether, it is hard to differentiate between the Sorbian and German lifestyle, since socio-economically Sorbs do not differ from the rest of the population living in the same area.

The **Sámi people** enjoy the status of the aborigines of Scandinavia and Finland. Sámi mythology relates that the Sámi have always lived in harmony with nature in Lapland (Aikio, Aikio-Puoskari and Helander 1994). Relatively recent research shows that the ancestors of the Sámi have even been legal landowners in Lapland (Korpijaakko-Labba 1994). However, Sámi history emphasises that the Sámi used to be nomads, following the course of wild reindeer, until space decreased as new inhabitants moved north and settled down. These newcomers are considered to be the ancestors of the Finns, who, as DNA studies seem to indicate, are genetically "of a different population" than the Sámi (Carpelan 1996: 10-14; Savontaus 1995). For some Sámi activists this information is very important: "We are not Finns, Swedes or Norwegians, even the genetic studies prove this", they say (Interviews FS24). Today, Sámi people live in four different states: Norway, Sweden, Russia and Finland. Altogether, there are estimated to be about 70,000 Sámi. About 6,500 Sámi live in Finland (Pentikäinen 1995a; Kitti 1995). There are nine to eleven different Sámi languages and even more dialects. Three of the languages, Northern, Inari and Skolt Sámi, are spoken in Finland. There are difficulties in maintaining all the Sámi languages, and there is a concern that only the largest of the Sámi languages, Northern Sámi, spoken in Norway, Sweden and Finland, might survive (Pentikäinen 1995b). Because it is the most widely spoken, it has the best chance of becoming the Sámi *lingua franca*.

The Sámi organisations are the heart of the minority's existence. As the lecturer of Sámi studies at the University of Helsinki, Irja Seerujärvi-Kari said, *"I believe that the Sámi are the best-organized people in the world. They have found* [sic] *many kinds of local, national and international organisations, ideological associations and hobby clubs."* (Quoted after Korhonen 1997, 5-6). Association and organisation life has always been critical to the modern Sámi existence. In the beginning of the twentieth century, many Finnish and foreign academics became interested in "helping Lappish people" to create their own organisations. In the 1930s, an important support organisation of the Sámi, "Lapin Sivistysseura", was founded. Samuli Aikio, a researcher of Sámi origins, noted that in the 30s, many of these Sámi societies and organisations were founded in a global context of nationalistic and fascist ideas, which represented a very real threat to national minorities in many parts of Europe. This atmosphere was also tangible in Finland and lead to the development of many organisations to protect Sámi heritage (Aikio 1984, 28). Another important Sámi organisation in Finland and the most important political actor until the Sámi Parliament was founded in 1973, Samii Litto, mainly had members who identified themselves as Sámi. The Sámi Parliament continued the political work of Samii Litto and was able to establish a democratic basis for Sámi politics in Finland. In Norway, Sweden and soon also in Russia, similar kinds of parliaments have developed. In every country, the Sámi elite have slightly different goals, but their main programme goals are developed by the Nordic co-operation of the Sámi Council (before 1992, the Nordic Sámi Council), founded in 1956. With the "law on cultural autonomy" in 1996, the Sámi Parliament in Finland was replaced with the Sámeting (Saamelaiskäräjät) (Government Act 974/95).

It is true for Finnish Lapland and for the German Lausitz that many educated minority members have found regular employment in the minority institutions. There are some professions that are traditionally seen as Sámi occupations, like reindeer farming. However, even though the Sámi (as opposed to the Sorbs) still have a "traditional" lifestyle, it is today shared by many Finns and has become highly modernised. All people in Lapland live in similar kinds of houses and share many aspects of life, irrespective of their ethnic affiliation.

There are some major changes in the political situation of Europe in the 1990's that have an enormous influence on all European minority movements. Sorbian history and the many advantages that came with the GDR era have a remarkable influence on the current situation of the Sorbs. However, the unification of Germany did not only make the old options vanish, but at the same time opened new doors: In 1990, for example, the Domowina became a member of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages. Domowina has launched many significant cultural exchange programmes, supported partly by the EU and international organisations, with the Czech Republic and Poland. For the Sorbian minority, the European Union and European minority politics play an important role - not only because of financial support but even more because of moral guidelines of the European Parliament and European Council. This applies to Sámi

organisations, too. Finland became a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1994, and joined the EU in 1995. Even more important for the development of Sámi politics in Finland has been the collapse of the Soviet Union, which opened the door for Finland to become a full member of the European Council.

Some field notes on how minorities define themselves as nations

I did my field work in 1995-1997, travelling by car around Sápmi and Lusatia, interviewing 45 activists and politicians of the Sámi and Sorbian minority movements. Some of them were working for minority organisations, others devoting their leisure time to them. The interviews lasted 1-3 hours, and included personal questions and open discussion about the legal, social, economic and educational situation of the Sorbs and Sámi. I was interested in hearing how the minority members define themselves and their minority movement without asking direct questions about it. At the same time, I met many people who did not like to be seen as minority members and talked with them about the reasons for identifying or not identifying themselves as minority members. All interviews are coded because anonymity was important for most people I talked with. As another method of gaining information on how the group defines itself and even more to establish the arguments through which it claims a need for specific treatment, I analysed minority publications, leaflets and diverse organisation materials representing the minority, its culture, traditions and language, and local newspapers in both Lapland and Lausitz.

In the following, I am going to give some examples of the self-definitions made by the people I interviewed, modifying a schema proposed by Xosé Núñez Seixas (1993). I want to make a short excursion into my field notes in order to show how the essentialistic identity concept is used by the minority activists and politicians to create and recreate their groups as "a" people eligible for the protection and support promised in the international minority protection treaties for national minorities. My aim is to show that the activists are forced to operate with this kind of nationalist self-definition if they want their groups to enjoy the status of a national minority. According to my research, the following factors seem to be important for the self-definition of Sámi and Sorb activists. In the discourse of affirmative elements, the activists stress that because they have their own culture, their own language, a history different from that of the majority and because they still have their own homeland, they do form their own nations. For instance, one officer of the Sorbian movement says: *"You really should drive out to the villages. There you find the old, beautiful lifestyle which we have lost [here in the city]. The Germans have lost their traditions, but we haven't"* (DS16). The activists like to stress that their mentality differs from that of the majority population, that they have their own specific world view. In the words of one Sorbian interviewee: *"Our*

culture is certainly a different culture, as you can see in the costumes, as you can hear in the music, maybe [you see it] a bit less in the painting, but it is a different colour. We come out of a different culture – we are a different culture" (DS12). With these affirmative elements, the activists give the impression both to their colleagues and to the wider population that there is a specific emotional bond linking the minority members of the same blood, fate and culture. As one Sámi activist pointed out: "*The Finns do not have a mental landscape like us, a bond with this area. For us [Sámi people] this is home*" (FS4).

Another definition of "the other" helps the activists to define how their group differs from these "others". To be a Sámi or a Sorb is also to be defined through implicit and explicit comparison with "others", with Finns and Germans respectively. In the interviews, the statement of "what we are like" was always the opposite of the comments about "what the others are like". The majority society is hardly a strange place for the Sorbs or the Sámi, as many are fully integrated into the majority populations. The strangeness is represented in a purely idealised form. In this discourse, defining the majority institutions as strange and as a threat to the minority, activists legitimate their will to create their own institutions equivalent to the institutions of the majority. The negative and positive strangers were used to describe the kind of "otherness" that was threatening to minority identification and the kind that was supportive. In Finnish Lapland, the Sámi experience is: "*Many inhabitants here are annoyed that there are other nationalities – like us Sámi – living here. They just say 'we are in Finland and here everyone should speak Finnish'*" (FS13). In the schools, one teacher said: "*The interesting point is that the more distance the pupils family has from their Sami roots the more open-minded they generally are towards the Sámi language*" (FS4). This is a experience shared by Sorbian activists who say that the West Germans are often much more open-minded towards Sorbian culture than the local Germans. Those who live among or next to the Sorbs or the Sámi develop a resentment, and some have questioned: "*Why do they have separate treatment – they are exactly like us*" (DS16). As one interviewee summarised: "*A threat from outside (...) has lead to closer ties among us. The negative publicity has given an inner boost to [our minority] movement*" (FS3).

In my study, I called one group of "others" "the strangers among us". They are potential members needed by the minority organisation. Their membership could make it possible for the minority group to gain both power and numbers. They sometimes give a new direction to the minority movement. While the elite try to keep dissidents quiet, they simultaneously try to encourage new people to join the movement. The activists try to encourage people to "*to declare their roots*" (FS1). As one Sorb politician said: "*The overwhelming part of our people have scarcely had anything to do with politics and therefore they could never understand the backgrounds of diverse things (...) it is our task to show them the correct way to go*" (DS14).

The third element of the discourse of self-definition is about re-integration as a selective process. Minority activists try to look for people who could be seen as potential members, and motivate those persons to come and join the movement. This is a difficult task, as the group of "potential members" is not very large, according to one activist: *"We have one weak point (...) public relations. It [a positive picture of the group] is not very attractive"* (DS17). It is a difficult task to lure families back to the movement that, just one generation ago, got rid of the stigma of being a minority member. As one Sámi activist pointed out: *"Many of the people living here have not been a Sámi for generations and want to be neither Sámi or Finnish"* (FS8). A Sorb said: *"There are some [Sorbs] (...) who tell they are Sorbs, but do not speak the Sorbian language anymore and do not care about the minority identity (...). I guess most of the Sorbs just don't have the necessary national consciousness"* (DS10). The problem of "re-integrating" these potential members is that so many of them do not *feel* like a national minority.

The last element used by the interviewees is called an "analogy discourse" here. This is when activists use the stories of another minority group as a positive model to help convince people that they are also able to challenge state politics and policies in a way that helps the activists. One of the persons interviewed said: *"Four days ago I visited the Frisian minority and we exchanged information on how they preserve and revitalize their language in practice and so on (...) it is a great help, this 'know-how' exchange among minorities. Often you get affirmation that other minorities have similar problems to us and (...) you can learn so much, because some succeed while others do not. This experience of exchange is for me the cheapest invention existing – it cannot be measured with money"* (DS16). The analogies are used as examples to help demand rights from the government, and are also used to convince potential minority members, as when one activist said: *"If the Inuit can get this through, we shall also make it"* (FS3).

The four main elements of the discourse of self-representation or "making of a national minority" analysed above – affirmative elements, definition of others, re-integration, and the analogy discourse – are used by activists of the minorities to shape and re-shape the official picture of the movement and reach out to their members (actual and potential) in wider society or in other countries.

International minority rights, as well as most of the European treaties and recommendations, operate with old-fashioned and essentialist minority and identity concepts. This agenda radiates through national policy which, in turn, affects the self-image and identity strategies of the minority activists. The common-sense image of a homogenous minority is used in this discourse to help organisations define themselves as a real minority, a people, with a collective identity.

Summary: Mimesis and Minority Rights

This is the final part of this paper. Here I want to bring together the previously discussed subjects: on the one hand, international rights and the case studies, and on the other hand, the concept of mimesis and minority identity.

The member states of the European Union view themselves as liberal democracies, as states that guarantee individual freedom and human rights (McGrew 1997). They have signed a vast number of bills concerning cultural matters in order to guarantee cultural exchange and democracy. Cultural democracy means that all people and groups should actively participate in the process of cultural production, consumption and legitimisation. Moreover, minorities - according to the principles of cultural democracy - have the same right to participate in the cultural flourishing of the states they inhabit. Behind these recommendations, we still find the assumption that it is only natural that every human being belongs to only one nation and feels at home in only one culture. Furthermore, this notion implies that all nations and all peoples do have one culture - one pure culture - to defend (Eriksen 1993), to protect from hybridity[3], and to maintain for subsequent generations. Zygmunt Bauman (1992, 155-160) has called this whole phenomenon "Kampf gegen Ambivalenz". Already, at its starting-point, the mixture or creolization of cultures is defined as a problem, as if it would be enough for the mental stability of one human being to handle only one culture (Eriksen 1993, 53). Along these same paths of argument, national minorities ask for rights for their specific culture, which needs to be protected against other cultures; against mixture and impurity. In order to enjoy protection and rights, the one culture has to be defined and demarcated from other, maybe even quite similar cultures. In this process the culture has to be politicised and instrumentalised as a national culture, the culture of one distinctive nation. Potentially, this kind of understanding of the concept of national culture can be used as an identity resource. But how can a culture be constructed to have the qualities needed to serve as an effective political resource - a political resource that would allow people to demand not only distinctiveness, but more especially, equal status?

For it to serve appropriately as a modern resource for a minority, the minority activists need to work on their concept of culture. One effective strategy to modify it is to historicise the minority experience. In studying the way Sorbian and Sámi activists represent their culture as a national culture, the organisations' materials, interviews and observations in minority associations and institutions indicated how minority history follows and imitates the history of the dominant nation, the official state history. It offers an alternative to the dominant histographical models and explains *how* the minority

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[3] Hybridity characterises a project in which, unconsciously or consciously through mimetic processes, interactions and inventions, cultural qualities are mixed with each other. The notion of hybridity wants to comprehend the reality behind the idealistic and monolithic cultural models.

ended up as a minority. The legends or stories about the Sorbian and Sámi minorities have, in this sense, a lot in common. They describe how a little nation, suffering under a lack of an educated elite and other resources, fought its way through troubles, and even wars, and managed to *maintain* and *preserve* its ancient identity to this day. In this canon of history there is always just one nation and one history in singular. Sources for this "collective" identity and its preservation are found in distinctive incidents and events, which are pushed to the foreground as a kind of basis for the minority existence.

All groups formed by people are, without question, heterogeneous. This heterogeneity is, for most of the minority activists, much less of a problem. Amongst the Sámi and Sorbian movements, heterogeneity is generally considered to be absolutely natural, but for "the public" there must be a monolithic canon to represent. In the same way, activists have to agree on the contents of some "plausible" moments of identification. Even though the Sorbian and Sámi history, and even other identity resources, differ from each other in many respects, a considerable number of similar guidelines and parallel discourses can be recognised in the mobilisation processes or in the identity politics of the minority activists. The key for the identity politics of both organisations is to represent the minority as "a people", "a nation" belonging together biologically, historically and culturally, sharing a common past and a common future.

It can be deduced that the common language of nation-building at the beginning of the last century has re-surfaced in the language of minority activists. The common-sense image of a homogenous minority used in the international minority protection treaties must be used in the discourse to help the minority organisations establish themselves as a protected national minority. The international minority laws codified, for example, in the UN, ILO, Council of Europe and OSCE, are often used as an argument to show that the minority organisation may regulate membership within their minority. The minority protection treaties and recommendations define minorities as groups with one unified mind. According to these treaties, minorities speak one language, share one culture and live in their ancient territories. The treaties help to maintain the myth that these minorities have preserved their identity throughout history. Therefore, if the minority elites want to claim their rights, there are few alternatives for them but to attempt to nationalise and homogenise the minority. To be taken seriously, the non-dominant cultures in Europe, and maybe elsewhere too, have to imitate the hegemonic model of the nation-state used and cultivated in transnational organs. States clearly tend to support specific kinds of groups: those that are able to convince others that they do constitute a "real minority", "bearing" distinctive cultural and national features, get support and protection for their identity politics. Cultural and ethnic minorities use mimesis as a strategy of cultural survival, and it is difficult to imagine any other options for most minority movements in Europe.

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