

## ENJOYING THE TOWER OF BABILON The Role of Minorities in a Globalized World\*

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What I am going to present you is the interim result of almost twenty years of research in multilingual and multicultural territories of Central Europe as well as my study of social theory on the topic of the inter-relation between multicultural societies and intercultural educational systems<sup>1</sup>. For the sake of theoretical clarity I shall sketch four ideal-type models of how multicultural societies may be organized. Each of them is an abstract construction and does not exist in its pure form in reality. Reality is infinitely more complex than theoretical concepts and tends to mess up theories. Still I insist that each one of the four ideal type models has close links to reality even if it is not identical with reality.

Each of my four models reflects in one way or the other the political history, the political principles and the political ambitions of the respective societies from which my findings have been drawn. My studies in Non-European countries such as Nicaragua and Indonesia have convinced me about their validity in a wider context.

### Model 1: The destruction model.

One could call it the Hitler-Stalin-Milošević model. This is a model based on destruction. Everything that does not belong to the ruling culture is destroyed or driven out. History is full of examples, starting from ancient times up to the present.

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<sup>1</sup> For further study of my empirical research see Dietmar Larcher (1988), *Sprache, Macht und Identität*. In Børge Boeckmann et al., ed. (1988), *Zweisprachigkeit und Identität*. Klagenfurt/Celovec: Drava 1988, p. 9-14; Dietmar Larcher (1988), *Soziogenese der Urangst*: ibid. p. 15-64; Dietmar Larcher (1991), *Fremde in der Nähe*. Klagenfurt/Celovec: Drava 1991; Dietmar Larcher (1992), *Kulturschock*. Merano/Meran: Alpha&Beta; Dietmar Larcher et al. (1997), *Zwischen Herkunft und Zukunft. Südtirol im Spannungsfeld zwischen ethnischer und postnationaler Gesellschaftsstruktur*. In print (Merano/Meran: Alpha&Beta).

My theoretical studies are based among others on J. Victor Baldrige (1975), *Sociology. A Critical Approach*. New York: John Wiley & Sons; Zygmunt Bauman (1997), *Postmodernity and its Discontents*. Cambridge: Polity Press; Ulrich Beck (1986), *Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp; Ulrich Beck (1994), *Neonationalismus oder das Europa der Individuen*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp; Anthony Giddens (1997, 3rd edition), *Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press; Jürgen Habermas (1990), *Die Moderne - ein unvollendetes Projekt*; Leipzig: Reclam 1990; Jürgen Habermas (1996), *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen. Studien zur politischen Theorie*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp; Frederic Jameson (1991), *The Logic of Late Capitalism*. London, New York: Verso; Alexander Langer (1996), *Aufsätze zu Südtirol. Scitti sul Sudtirolo. 1978 - 1995*. Merano/Meran: Alpha&Beta; Immanuel Wallerstein (1989), *The Modern World System. vol. III, Second Era of the Great Expansions of the Capitalist World Economy*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

The educational system consists of a national school system that does not provide any instruction for those groups of the population whose first language is different from the language of the dominant group. Children are taught in the one and only national language even if they do not understand a word of this language. Their family languages are considered private vernacular and are neither the language of instruction nor are they taught in special lessons.

Such language policy has its origin in 19th century nation building. When the European empires began their transformation process from loosely connected multilingual organisations into national states most of them had two cultural goals: the putting through of one national language and the creation of a national identity. One of the best examples of how such European nation building worked was Italy in the 19th century. When the territory of the Italian national state was in the end successfully united after decades of propaganda struggles and some fighting, it was found out that only 2,5 percent of the inhabitants used standard Italian as a means of communication. In the first reunion of parliament in 1861, Massimo d'Azeglio stated: "We have created Italy, now we are going to create the Italians."

Of course, this was not only the case in Italy. Take the Austrian province of Carinthia, for example, where there had always been a Slovene speaking group settling, long before Germans arrived. However, during the century of nation building this Slovene group was the subject of linguistic submersion programmes. Even nowadays, when Austria is rediscovering its multicultural past and is looking with sympathy at the multilingual character of some of its regions, there are quite a number of Slovenes, usually from the older generation, who prefer not to speak Slovene in public although nobody prevents them now from doing so. Actually one of the consequences of all this is a "benevolent" pressure towards adoption of the national language built into the culture of daily interaction. It is taken for granted that it is always the Slovenes who have to be bilingual and never the German speaking majority. Thus in every interaction between the groups automatically German is used while on the other hand the benevolent majority feels pity over the loss of Slovene as a second language.

## **Model 2: Assimilation model. One might call it the melting pot model.**

Model 2 is a soft version of model 1 insofar as genocide is replaced by linguistic and cultural genocide. Model 2 is also built on the assumption that a multicultural society can only function if it becomes monocultural. However, instead of killing or driving out people whose language and culture differ from that of the ruling majority, assimilation is the key to achieving a monocultural society.

As far as school education is concerned, this is also a top down model in which the national school system is based on the one and only national language, although there exist other linguistic groups within the boundaries of the state who differ from the dominating group in language and culture. The school system pays attention to these different groups by providing an initial phase of bilingual instruction so as to facilitate and speed up the assimilation process of children. This bilingual phase of instruction usually is limited in time and ends after the first year at school. Its chief goal is to reduce children's shock when they are confronted with the official language which is completely new to

them and it also is meant to support teachers in their job of implanting the national language into children's heads as the privileged medium of communication.

Let us have a look at Carinthia again with its Slovene minority in the South. In the last decades of the Hapsburg monarchy, Slovene was a support language to an extent necessary for the teacher to make herself understood in the classroom. After the first year of instruction Slovene as a supporting language was not used any longer. After the Second World War this country introduced compulsory bilingual instruction in all schools of the bilingual territory which meant that fifty percent of the language used in the classroom was Slovene. In the fifties German nationalists succeeded in reducing the status of Slovene from a compulsory language for all pupils to a medium of instruction only for those who explicitly declare their preference for the bilingual school. However, bilingual instruction for this group of volunteers provides equal time for both languages only up to the end of the third year of elementary school. From then on, Slovene is not any longer used as the medium of instruction. From the fourth year of education onwards it becomes one subject among many others. From the age of fourteen onwards, it gets more and more difficult to find schools where Slovene is taught<sup>1</sup>. So even for the subscribers to bilingual instruction there is only a very limited chance of really getting what they have opted for. The consequence is that for the majority of kids there is little chance to develop their bilingual skills after the first three years of elementary school. In fact, the hidden curriculum of such an educational system has one message to teach: Slovene is good for small children and for simple things. As soon as you become adult and matters become more complicated German is superior. This is, of course, assimilation, even if it is applied in a homeopathic way: The more experience, knowledge and skills you have collected the more difficult it becomes for you to articulate all this in your native tongue and the more you have to resort to the national language in order to verbalize and structure your personal growth until in the end you find that your inner language, the language in which you think, plan and calculate, is not your own any more and that also most discussions on very important, but controversial topics are not conducted in your own language. Never. This means that by and by you start to think and construct your personal identity in the dominant language. Sooner or later you find out that you have become one of them. But sometimes at home you remember that when you were a child you had a different language.

We have learnt from doctors at the local hospital that often enough old people when they are going to die fall back into this native language of theirs and although for the last sixty years in their lives they had not spoken a word of Slovene they suddenly forget all their German in the face of death and can only articulate words in Slovene. I do not think this is very different from many other minority situations in the world. But nowhere the majority cares to know about it.

If minority children are brought up in an assimilation model like this they suffer from consequences on different levels. First of all their language competence is reduced in both languages, while second self-confidence is low and identity formation becomes very difficult. Children who live in such contexts suffer from a paradoxical phenomenon: Their parents want them to succeed in life. Therefore they avoid their own native language when interacting with them. They use the majority language in almost every parent-child interaction and they try hard to use the national language also for their own private con-

<sup>1</sup> There are a Slovene grammar school and also a commercial school at Celovec/Klagenfurt and a private secondary school at St. Jakob i. R.

versations. But in many cases parents are not aware of their own pitfalls and problems with the national language and, what makes things worse, they do not feel emotionally at home in the target language so that as a result of their good intentions they teach the child a very restricted language. Such children often discover at school that their way of using the national language makes them outsiders and scapegoats. Their parents' original language remains a hidden culture to them while at the same time there is no easy access to the national language for them. In fact, this access has become more difficult because of their linguistic socialisation. All this does not really encourage them to take part in intercultural communication because in many cases they have acquired a basic distrust in language.

### **Model 3: Ethnopluralism - the multicultural model**

In this model the organization of society allows all language and ethnic groups full cultural autonomy. But the price for such autonomy is that each of the groups has to establish more or less a parallel society with very few links between each of the parallel societies. The Province of Bolzano/South Tyrol is probably the best example of an ethnopluralist model in Central Europe.

As far as education is concerned, each ethnic group has a school-system of its own which functions as a subsystem of the national school system. In each of these sub-systems the language of instruction is the native language of the respective group. Usually the other national languages are obligatory subjects on the curriculum. Theoretically there are strong links between the different sub-systems, so that students become aware that they live in a multicultural and multilingual society. In reality sub-systems often tend to be concerned with their own business only and care very little for the others. The institutional links between the systems are often neglected and sometimes are even looked down upon or considered a great threat to the interests and the identity of one's own ethnic group.

However, if there are strong networks between the different ethnic groups built into the system, this may be an acceptable way of organizing cultural and linguistic diversity. It must be granted, though, that the ties between the individual subsystems are stronger than the ethnocentric interests of the individual groups. In political theory this is called the priority of demotic over ethnic interests. "Demotic" is derived from the Greek word "DĒMOS", the common people, while "ethnic" is derived from "ETHNOS", the people of a certain clan or extended family. The word democracy stems from *demos*, not from *ethnos*. The ethnic principle is in fact pre-democratic. Societies which have opted for the policy of ethnopluralism in organizing multilingual and multicultural difference must therefore take great care for the democratic process not only to include individuals, but also ethnic groups into their discourse. In the process of mediation between conflicting ethnic interests there must be a strong constitutional bond which each of the different ethnic groups respects even more than the ethnocentric interests which are their *raison d'être*. Only under these premises is it possible to reconcile the two principles of *demos* and *ethnos*.

On the other hand this ethnopluralistic system works well with authoritarian systems that have a strong and charismatic leader who is respected by all ethnic groups. This is the case in Singapore, for example. But what happens when the charismatic leader disappears? Recent history has taught us a lesson about this.

Opting for the ethnopluralistic model of education includes the obligation to devote large parts of the curriculum to language and culture awareness so as to constantly draw students' attention to the fact that they share the territory with other people who speak other languages and organize their lives according to other cultural values than those of the own group. The languages of the other groups should be obligatory subjects of the curriculum. In fact, networking is one of the central obligations of such schools: Each individual school should try to have partner schools and partner classes of other language groups for regular meetings and common projects where students learn to cooperate across language barriers in mixed groups.

#### **Model 4: The Intercultural Model - Linguistic and cultural integration**

It is based on the assumption that in a multicultural and multilingual society the public sphere should be multilingual. Production, distribution, economy, ecology, social policy, health care, education, administration and, of course, politics should be multilingual, while questions of ethnic identity should be left in the private sphere of each group. The French revolution has taught us to keep state and religion apart. Twentieth century history should teach us to keep state and ethnicity apart.

This integration model has an educational system which provides compulsory multilingual schools and multilingual instruction for each child that lives within a multilingual territory, irrespective of the child's first language. There is only one school system and only one curriculum, but both, the system and the curriculum, are multilingual. The chief goal is to create language and culture awareness in students and also to practice living in the tower of Babylon because any multicultural classroom is in fact such a tower of Babylon where different languages and different cultural behaviour patterns clash. It is of vital importance for the success of this model that the school structure allows enough resources for small classrooms, team teaching, multilingual materials, and a lot of project work. Since modern educational theory has done very little to develop special teaching methods for multilingual and multicultural classrooms a lot of experimental teaching must be done in order to make the tower of Babylon an attractive and instructive place to live in.

In October 1997 I had the privilege of taking part in such a multicultural experiment with one of my colleagues at Klagenfurt university, Ms. Rabenstein of the French department, who had invited me to join in. We were supposed to go to Luxembourg to meet a group of sixteen persons, all of them between twenty and twenty six years old. They came from five different European countries and spoke four different languages. The day we met them was the very first day they got to know each other. They had never been together before. They were on a one year international project for the integration of handicapped people into art processes and this was their first week together. We had a week's time to make a working team out of a number of isolated individuals with different languages. For this purpose we had to make some of them acquainted with English, others with French, again others with German and most of them with Italian, so that they would no longer be afraid of language barriers that existed in the group and also that they would dare experiment with all these different languages. We used a method which was designed by French authors and was based on literary techniques rather than functional

language use<sup>3</sup>. For a whole week we were simulating life on a lonely island with each of the students adopting a fictitious identity and inventing the surroundings in which all this was to take place. Even the name of the island was invented by the group and so was the plot of the island drama. By the end of the week they were used to the tower of Babilon situation. In fact, the strange and the foreign had become normal to each of them thanks to temporary alienation from their national identity. And they had developed a lot of strategies for mutual understanding and communication across the language barriers. Each one of them took pleasure in cross-cultural language experiments and each one was by then used to work in small mixed language groups where everyone spoke a different idiom. The week after they had a Tandem-project which means that they were organized in mixed language pairs who had to teach each other their native language under the supervision of a language teacher whom they could consult and ask for help when they had problems in explaining.

At school level there are some, but not many systems that have established this integrative model. There is Luxembourg, for example, which is close to the ideal type, but also the Ladin -Reto-Roman school system in Northern Italy (the third language group in Bolzano/Bozen - Südtirol) and in Switzerland. While in Luxembourg every child has to undergo total immersion in three languages consecutively, Luxembourgish being the only language in the first year, German in the following years of elementary education, French during secondary education, the students in Ladin schools take turns day by day. The Ladin schools I visited used German as language of instruction exclusively on Monday and Tuesday, Ladin on Wednesday, and Italian on Friday and Saturday.

Such school systems reflect more or less integrated multiethnic societies with strong democratic constitutional bonds based on human rights. The German social philosopher Habermas calls this "constitutional patriotism" as opposed to national or ethnic patriotism whose goal is to promote group identity at the cost of other groups, a behaviour pattern which is better known by the name of ethnocentrism. Schools of the model 4 type are places where children learn integration by daily interaction with others who speak different languages. For them linguistic and cultural diversity becomes normal and daily communication in more than only one language is natural routine. The danger with this system is that if one language has a privileged position (because it is the language of the media or it is a high status language, or because it is spoken by a large majority) it tends to become a soft version of the assimilation model where you do not even realize that you are being assimilated.

Let me now make my point. Postmodern societies in the rich world centres all have the problem that the nation as a principle of organization is losing its importance rapidly. On the one hand, there is a growing tendency of nation states to merge, and on the other hand there is a growing world market which is being made use of by international companies. Although the European Union, for example, is a union of fifteen different nations, Brussels overrules national legislation and economy. The present day dynamics of world wide economy speed up the process of de-nationalization. No national government can control the flow of money any more. No national government can force its rules on international companies any more. In fact, the globalization of economy has reduced the traditional power and influence of the nation even more.

<sup>3</sup> For further information see Helga Rabenstein (1994), *Una simulazione globale: "L'immeuble"*. In Siegfried Baur and Sandra Montali, ed. (1994), *Lingue tra culture. Per una didattica creativa delle lingue seconde e straniere*. Merano/Meran: Alpha&Beta 1994, 93 - 98.

In times of globalization the nation state's preference for monolingual education becomes obsolete, because what is required now in politics, in business, in everyday life is no longer the monolingual individual but an individual with multilingual and intercultural competence. The traditional nation state has provided an educational system that has taught its students "foreign" languages. But foreign language instruction won't do any more. For life in a globalized society one has to be able to live in several languages, not just to have a command of foreign languages. In the traditional nation state foreign language learning had been a special branch of education which was considered more or less suitable for young ladies of the upper classes who would not be integrated into the production process anyway. But thanks to foreign language teaching they could travel abroad and read foreign literature. This has changed rapidly. Nowadays multilingual competence is a prerequisite for everyone who wants to succeed in professional life. The nation state is realizing all of a sudden that its educational policy has to be changed from monolingualism to multilingualism in order to provide its citizens with the most basic quality for success in the globalized world.

Small minorities, however, if they have lived in a model of the number three or number four type, find themselves in a situation of great advantage, because for them it has been a matter of course to grow up bilingual or even multilingual. For them, living in two languages and in two cultures has become second nature, as it were. They are the genuine bilinguals whose socialization process has equipped them with the most precious linguistic and intercultural qualities. Even in a country like Carinthia which for a whole century has done everything to assimilate its Slovene population it is beginning to dawn upon the majority that the bilingual situation in Southern Carinthia is a great advantage not only for the members of Slovene families but for all people living there.

Of course, Carinthian Slovenes have always known that this is so. But maybe the German speaking majority is beginning to realize now that globalization is starting to dominate our lives that having this Slovene speaking minority is like having a turbo engine in one's car. It could make Carinthia more attractive for investors as an industrial site and as a centre of trade and commerce.

The political systems in the countries I know best (Austria and Italy) are slow to realize this change in attitude. The ruling politicians are hesitant to open up the educational system for full scale bilingualism. But in South Tyrol as well as in Carinthia there is a new tendency of NGOs and of the civil society in general to take advantage of bilingualism as a resource for self-empowerment. After authorities had denied bilingual infant schools, parents themselves established trilingual ones in autonomous projects. And teachers themselves are creating a trilingual immersion model at the Slovene grammar school of Celovec/Klagenfurt (the "Kugy-Class, with 50% of its students being Carinthian Slovenes, 25% Italian Slovenes, and 25% Slovenian Italians).

There is a growing interest of the German speaking majority in such initiatives. Although no systematic research has so far been done into this new attitude, it seems to me that a rising number of monolinguals are becoming aware that for their children to succeed in a multilingual and multicultural society of the near future it is indispensable to be multilingual. It is worth mentioning here that the more language skills are kept apart from ethnic identity the easier it is for the majority to cooperate with the minority in establishing multilingual educational institutions.

I do hope that this recent trend that can be extrapolated from school statistics will be stronger than any anti-modernisation movement persuading people that the answer to

globalization is the extermination of anything which does not fit into the pattern of the monolingual and the monocultural nation. I do hope that people start realizing what Kotkin calls the big advantage of ethnic groups in a globalized world: They have a strong sense of identity, they have developed linguistic and cultural skills for life in a postmodern world, and they have learned to form networks in order to survive. In other words, Kotkin's definition of ethnicity is not tribal but post-national. He is stressing the importance of non-tribal ethnicities in the organization of the globalised world. It is exactly the qualities he describes that are required. If majority populations take advantage of their minorities - which means the installation of model number four, the intercultural integration model - all members of the society will profit. In other words, I am not altogether pessimistic as far as the role of minorities in times of globalization is concerned. With their experience and their skills they can teach all of us what it means to enjoy the Tower of Babylon.

#### Povzetek

#### **Veselje v babilonskem stolpu. Vloga manjšin v globaliziranem svetu**

V zgodovini zasledimo štiri idealne modele preseganja družbene, etnične, kulturne in jezikovne raznolikosti. Prvi model temelji na etničnem čiščenju, drugi je asimilacijski model talilnega lonca, tretji model riše meje med različnimi skupnostmi in ustvarja ločene vzporedne skupnosti v skladu z načeli apartheida, četrty model pa različne skupnosti povezuje v demokratično večjezično oziroma večkulturno družbo, v kateri ima vsaka skupina dovolj prostora za ohranjanje svoje etnične identitete. Globalizirana ekonomija zaradi dobička podpira četrty model. Pojav podjetniške miselnosti odpira povsem nove možnosti za dvo- in večjezična območja, kjer zdaj celo večinsko prebivalstvo ugotavlja, da so jezikovne manjšine bogastvo in ne nevarnost. Tudi manjšine počasi spoznajo, da njihova vloga v postmoderni družbi globalne ekonomije ni omejena na folkloro; nasprotno, prav manjšine so katalizator družbenega razvoja v smeri večjezičnega izobraževanja in večkulturnosti. Bližnja prihodnost bo pokazala, ali bodo napredni trendi prevladali nad reakcionarnimi težnjami politike, ki podpira družbo etničnih razlik, rasizma in etnocentrizma.

Avtor, ki izhaja iz Webrove teorije in še zlasti iz Schutzove kritične analize Webrovih pojmov, v teorijo etničnosti vnaša nekaj novih temeljnih konceptov; to so naprimer 'živiljenjski svetovi', 'žsvetovi pomenov in pripadanj' ter 'žstruktura relevantnosti'. Opušča tudi ustaljeni diskurz 'žkulturnih razlik' kot središče etnične tematike. Kulturne razlike so bolj fiktiven oziroma ideološki kot realen fenomen in jih je moč razložiti le na osnovi drugih intelektualnih konstrukcij, zlasti socialnih povezav, med katerimi je še posebej pomembna vez sorodstvo oziroma skupni predniki. Sorodstvo je zelo pomemben dejavnik ustanavljanja etničnih skupnosti. Povezano je z dvojno izkušnjo odvisnosti in zaupanja, ki jo človek doživi v otroštvu. Razlike, okrog katerih se pletejo socialne identitete, so prepoznavne v 'žkulturnem šoku majhnih razlik' in v zaznavanju majhnih kulturnih in mnenjskih razlik med skupinami oziroma enotami na lokalni in regionalni ravni znotraj kulturno podobnih skupnosti. Te razlike so družbeno pomembne in so podlaga za »razmejevanje«. Ni važno, kako jih doživljajo zunanji opazovalci; njihov objektivni pomen je v tem, da so »sidrišča«, na katera se vežejo identitete.