

## Peace-Building and the Loop of Liberal Multiculturalism: The Case of Kosovo

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### **Abstract**

The liberal peace-building paradigm seeks to promote multiculturalism as a tool of peacemaking, for the purpose of resolving and achieving a political resolution to existing ethnic conflicts. The promotion of “multiculturalism” has been one of the primary concerns of the Peace-Building mission in Kosovo since 1999. It has been the commitment of the international presence in Kosovo to respect the rights and interests of minority communities that has led to the establishment of ethnic decentralisation policies. While this is a worthy aim we argue that the manner in which the policy has been implemented, through territorial decentralisation, has been ultimately counterproductive.

The paper highlights how a particularly narrow understanding of multiculturalism, dependent upon a categorical notion of identity, has elicited a society with homogenised groups divided by municipalities. This has resulted in the promotion of a multicultural approach at State level, supporting the existence of diverse groups, but which has ultimately imposed homogeneity within communities and polarized identities, as it has taken for granted already defined groups, omitting possible hybrid or ambiguous identities. This has, thus, perpetuated as well as institutionalised the existing ethnic divide. This uncritical application of multiculturalism has also resulted in a non-organic, undeveloped, fictional peace, therefore undermining the liberal ethos of the Peace-Building endeavour in Kosovo. The liberal alternatives provided to overcome the faults of territorial decentralisation in post-conflict peace-building, include non-territorial decentralisation and the creation of a transcendental identity. The paper argues that these alternatives are part of a loop of liberal multiculturalism which creates a paradox whereby on the one hand the end result may entail separation of different ethnic groups to protect minorities thus worsening the division between groups, and on the other hand, the creation of a cosmopolitan transcendental identity may not adequately be attentive to difference.

### *Introduction*

Modern States face the challenge of adapting diversity within politics and governmental frameworks; liberal States in particular, propose themselves as the champions of culture preservation and cultural accommodation.

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To reproduce a content-free concept of State, one that sets itself to be a culturally blank canvas upon which the subject is free to make the individualist decision of which culture to adopt, protect or identify with, such as the one proposed in the liberal democratic project, the liberal understanding of multiculturalism proposes a depoliticised and neutral understanding of preservation of culture and ethnicity, whereby institutions and customs born out of tradition and culture must conform with larger apparatuses of the rule of law (Park, 2010:414), neutral and content-free.

When violence breaks across ethnic lines, the question of dealing with difference in the peacebuilding process becomes more pressing. Multiculturalist scholars oppose in principle any method for eliminating cultural differences, such as forced mass-population transfers, secession or assimilation (McGarry and O'Leary, 1993). In order to resist these solutions, the decentralisation plan in Kosovo arises as method for managing differences. This case study will be used in this article in the first instance to highlight the inconsistencies of the territorial decentralisation approach, and, more generally, to demonstrate the narrow understanding of multiculturalism adopted by liberal multiculturalists in regards to the Balkans.

Predominantly, the aim of liberal peace-builders is to create a multicultural society and respect diversity without the necessity to secede groups, thus, in this case, defying John Mearsheimer's -an advocate of the partition of the whole Balkans in culturally homogeneous states- treacherous question, "does anyone seriously believe that the Albanian Kosovars and the Serbs can live together after all the bloodletting that has taken place?" (Mearsheimer, 2000:133).

The decentralisation process stems from the "ethnocultural justice" pursued in liberal democracies in western Europe, where the political power of the majority culture is counterbalanced with the adoption of minority rights and beneficial policies that accommodate distinctive identity groups. This is a form of correcting institutional inequalities, precisely "because no State can be culturally neutral, because state institutions are implicitly titled towards the needs, interests and identities of the majority group; and this creates a range of burdens, barriers, stigmatizations, and exclusions for members of minority groups, we need to adopt certain minority rights to remedy disadvantages" (Kymlicka and Norman, 2008:4).

True equality cannot be achieved under the umbrella of a neutral State, but under a committed state which is aware of cultural unfairnesses and provides different groups with the opportunity to self-govern. Citizens exercise liberal values such as freedom and autonomy within their own societal culture, and thus, groups that differ from the majority should have facilities to develop and consolidate their own culture (Kymlicka, 1997).

Cases of ethnic conflict regulation through decentralisation have been common in the peacebuilding endeavours in the Balkans, as the cases of Bosnia and Macedonia demonstrate. “Decentralisation as a political system seems to have become a 'one size fits all' device for the international community to 'freeze' ethnic conflict and escape its responsibility for dealing with the reasons behind these conflicts” (Monteux, 2006:163).

The aim of this article is to assess the multicultural agenda in Kosovo by investigating the decentralisation process initiated by the international organizations. In the context of post-conflict reconciliation, the liberal agenda pursued by the international community identified the local understanding of culture and ethnicity as the primary reason for the conflict itself, thus attempting to provide a framework of governance that would allow difference and culture, without necessarily allowing cross-level, dialectical interaction between different groups.

This article focuses on the practical application of the multicultural agenda in Kosovo by exploring and assessing the strategy of decentralisation as a means to resolve the ethnic tensions by assigning territorial autonomy to minorities for their protection. This approach to the issue of ethnic conflict supported by the likes of Kymlicka and Coackley, comes to represent a first attempt at managing difference by avoiding complete partition or secession. Nonetheless, this creates on the ground, as seen in the case of Kosovo, a number of issues related to the lack of the above mentioned dialectical relation between the autonomous municipalities and the central State, as well as being seen as a stepping stone to secession. As a consequence, a number of liberal alternatives to territorial decentralisation have

been suggested, that may resolve the segregation resulting from territorial autonomy arrangements.

The second suggestion, referred to in this article as non-territorial decentralisation based on the theory of consociationalism, supported by, amongst others, Lijphart and Koralka, stands in opposition to territorial decentralisation, particularly as it offers the possibility to decentralize power whilst remaining conscious of the protection of culturally different groups by establishing a membership-based federalism in lieu of a territory-based one. Nonetheless, as this article discusses, consociationalism may inadvertently incur the same pitfalls as territorial autonomy, namely the institutionalisation of the presence of two competing groups that merely need to accommodate and tolerate each other's divergent needs and interests, resulting in a static form of dialogue between groups, the essence of which is inevitably a zero-sum game between the opposing factions.

To overcome the limits of non-territorial administration, liberal scholars such as Simonsen, Horowitz and Hoxhaj have all suggested the need for the promotion of societal participation beyond ethnic lines, through introducing de-ethnicising policies. Nonetheless, as this article will argue, a form of participation based on citizenship instead of ethnicity might not sufficiently provide protection to those minorities that are the subject of institutional disadvantages. As this attempts to overcome competing difference by providing an overarching sense of citizenship to appeal to, this may also result into an integrative approach which may silence the minority voice when dissenting. This approach falls short of appreciating difference, by limiting its reach to a mere resolution of the ethnic conflict through toleration and compromise in the name of a transcendental identity. The alternatives discussed, provided with the purpose of overcoming the previous arrangements' shortcomings, may simply inadvertently come to result either in an intolerant, segregated and ultimately not truly peaceful society, or one which does not sufficiently respect difference.

These alternatives, thus, represent what is called in this article as the loop of liberal multiculturalism, which seeks to problematise ethnic identity and difference. With the last alternative provided, that of the formation and promotion of a transcendental identity based on citizenship, it is evident that liberal

multiculturalists are trapped in a paradox in which one may, on the one hand not sufficiently be able to support difference without reinforcing tensions, and on the other hand, if one wishes to transcend the identities by providing an overarching sense of citizenship, one may not adequately care for minorities.

The liberal understanding of multiculturalism, exemplified by the case of Kosovo in practice and by what we have identified as the above mentioned loop of liberal multiculturalism, thus appears to be particularly narrow as it finds no need to “broaden the interaction between the cultures present in the territory” (Goodin, 2006:294).

After the first decade of the new millennium, some problems crystallized into the global crisis that damaged the world economy, especially the Western economies. Despite some certain changes in the decision-making mechanisms and organization after the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force on December 1, 2009, the European Union (EU) decision makers could not set up a structure that could cope with the EU’s global and obstinate problems. It can be considered an illusion that the EU overcame the issues arising from the crisis after the EU Constitution was rejected, but in reality, the only benefit obtained from the Treaty of Lisbon was that it postponed dealing with obstinate issues for a later date (Dougan, 2008: 636). Under the pressure of merciless competition, the EU has to work out not only internal problems but also external ones that are generated from global actors and other developments.

The economic triumph, regarded as the most successful of all EU efforts in more than 50 years of its existence, which has been restructured along neoliberal lines since the mid-1980s (Bieler, 2009: 118), led an adaption to the EU as an economic giant. It is quite different from current circumstances since the incident. Greece, an EU member for thirty years, has experienced a budget crisis so severe that its deficit is four times the EU limit. People fear that the budget crisis could potentially spread to Spain and Portugal, which have been EU members for 25 years. All these are indicators that the EU had no mechanisms to prevent such economic and monetary crises, let alone recover from the effects of the crisis.

The impact of global developments and existing global financial and economic crisis indicate that the EU would need an imperative change. This change should be broad and intensive, not like superficial changes that resulted from the Lisbon Treaty. Continuing the status quo in the future can cause blood loss and at the end, the EU would change into a simple international organization that addresses economic and social problems as a regional power. EU members and decision makers would try to survive and make every effort to prevent it from happening. Therefore, the transformation of the EU seems inevitable.

Turkey was admitted to EEC in 1959 and its government policy seeks to join the EU but a big majority of the Turkish people think that their country will never be a full member, even if it fulfils the accession criteria (Şenyuva, 2009: 35). The dynamics within the EU have certain effects also on the Turkish people who have been waiting at Europe's door for more than 50 years. After the crisis broke out in the neighbouring country, Turkish people, who have been already desperate to get full membership, began to reconsider the meaning of full EU membership. Unlike the Greek people, the Turks were deprived of EU membership instruments, and yet managed to overcome the global crisis without any help from any international institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In this study, reconsidering almost all models developed before, a new form of the EU has been put forward in advance and we tried to specify the position of Turkey, after getting full membership, having the potential to contribute to chronic issues, in this unique EU structure.

## *I. Conflict Management and Multiculturalism in Kosovo: Territorial*

### *Decentralisation*

Territorial decentralisation, as a governmental arrangement to grant substantial autonomy to distinct territorial units within the State boundaries, is thought to reduce ethnic conflict by giving groups control over their own political, social and economic trajectories, and thus to be able to protect their interests and affairs. This formula to decentralise power enhances democratic accountability, as it

provides citizens a “government they can understand and control” (Ebel and Péteri in Ebel and Péteri, 2007:13). Furthermore, in a post-conflict situation, it seems to urge the necessity to align rival ethnocultural groups in different territories. The division of the population after episodes of violence reinforces the appetite to design autonomous arrangements which tend to preserve order and satisfy the immediate demands of the parties involved (Coackley, 2003). Goodin (2006) calls this 'protective multiculturalism', explaining that this form of multiculturalism seeks to protect cultural minorities from the oppression of the majority (Goodin, 2006:289).

The Head of Community Affairs Unit in the International Civilian Office in Kosovo, Naegeli, vehemently supports the multicultural project in Kosovo:

“Decentralisation creates places where all Kosovo citizens can feel at home, it contributes to stability, it opens space for investments fro economic development, it opens even space for reconciliation. decentralisation is the process of bringing government decisions closer to citizens and of bringing it closer to communities.” (Nagaeli, 2010, ICO interview)

In Kosovo, the ethnic decentralisation approach was introduced by the international community through UNMIK as a policy strategy to address the nature of the conflict and thus to tackle what was believed to be the source of instability. Presented to the Secretary General by Special Envoy Marttii Ahtisaari, the Comprehensive Proposal for Kosovo Status Settlement, known also as the Ahtisaari Plan, sought to resolve the issue of the final status of Kosovo by giving a distinctively decentralised solution to the ethnic conflict issue in the territory.

The plan, based on an asymmetrical system of shared power, provided autonomy for the minorities from the central government by establishing six new or enhanced municipalities within which Kosovo Serbs would represent the ethnic majority. Kosovo Serb municipalities became responsible for the regulation, protection and exercise of exclusive powers in matters concerning the local interest, in areas such as, amongst many others, higher education, secondary health care, cultural affairs, religious cultural heritage sites, local police and the entitlement to levy and collect local taxes, charges and fees (CPKSS, 2007:Annex III, Article 4 & Annex III, Article 8.2). According to article 8.4 of the Settlement, “municipalities

have the right to inter-municipal and cross-border cooperation in the areas of their own and enhanced competencies” (CPKSS, 2007, Article 8.2), thus also being granted the opportunity to receive funding from the government of Serbia, upon notification to the Central Treasury of Kosovo, on top of the additional funding the additional municipalities are granted by virtue of their enhanced competences (CPKSS, 2007:Annex III, article 10).

*A. A Practical Assessment of Decentralisation on the Ground*

The effectiveness of the decentralisation framework in Kosovo was monitored in June 2009 with a follow up document issued by the Kosovo Local Government Institute (KLG I). From the opening lines of the report, it appeared clear, that the enthusiasm shared by the liberal peace-builders for decentralisation was short-lived. One year on, as the report notes, “the question and challenge facing the new structures and responsibilities of Kosovo's local government is whether or not each municipality is able to successfully deliver its new responsibilities, and whether the establishment of new municipalities in Serbian inhabited areas is feasible” (KLG I, 2009:4).

Despite the initial support for the administrative management of ethnically divided municipalities, one year on, Kosovo's government is “far from establishing the new municipalities, let alone exercising the services and responsibilities allocated to them” (KLG I, 2009:4). According to the KLG I, Kosovo's decentralisation plan faces challenges born out of lack of collaboration, tolerance and participation of all communities in Kosovo, by pointing out the reluctance of Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians alike, to embrace the multicultural endeavour through supporting the decentralisation, by highlighting a lack of trust on both sides as well as the presence of binary opposing political interests, namely the status-free talks on the side of the K-Serbs, and self-determination and status resolution for K-Albanians. The report highlights the failure of the Ministry of the Local Government Administration (MLGA) to reach out to all communities and to pressure them into engaging with decentralisation (KLG I, 2009:13). Another issue identified by KLG I, is the inability of international donors to fund projects to help the implementation of decentralisation by failing to coordinate with the MLGA (ibid, 2009:26).

A UNDP Quarterly Report for 2009 also highlights some of the weak aspects of implementation of decentralisation in Kosovo. As of September 2009, it was noted that: no effective aid-coordination mechanism existed to ensure an equitable distribution of aid across all municipalities; no development plans for new municipalities exist, partially due to 'political circumstances'; inter-ministerial consultation on decentralisation is not yet functional; rise in ethnic tension following the establishment of political and territorial integrity of new municipalities (UNDP Quarterly Report, 2009). Yet, UNDP identifies the risk of failure of decentralisation as low, by proposing countermeasures rooted in cooperation and participation of high-level donors, mediators, international organisations and political party officials (UNDP Quarterly Report, 2009:11).

Asymmetrical power-sharing seems to fit harmoniously within the liberal framework of enabling individual autonomous choice-making and thus would appear to be the natural antidote to address ethnic conflict-based instability, as well the perfect blueprint upon which to build a tolerant, vibrant, multicultural society that would allow for democratic representation and participation, and most of all, liberalisation.

Yet, as will be discussed in the next paragraph, redesigning the delicate balance between local and central level of government in post-conflict societies is not easy as supporters of decentralisation think it to be. Nor is decentralisation capable of being the magic bullet to address the problem of a society as the liberal peace-builders and liberal multiculturalists would like it to be. The case of Kosovo, best highlights the paradoxes of the liberal approach to institutionalising multiculturalism through decentralisation.

Whilst it may seem to be the most suitable solution to the ethnic clashes in the Balkan region, and whilst the latter cannot be denied or ignored as historically relevant facts, it now seems possible to question and critique the rigid assumption of

a causal relation between the means (decentralisation) and the desired ends (multiculturalism).

*B. A theoretical Assessment of Territorial Decentralisation*

Although the form of decentralisation that links ethnicity and territory is attentive to the demands of the opposed groups that have been involved in the conflict, it increases the risk of institutionalising ethnic differences. As ethnic territorial decentralisation relies upon a static notion of contending ethnic groups, the borders include one group and exclude another. Reconciliation or cooperation becomes problematic, as patterns of conflict are reproduced instead of appeased when peacebuilding is about mapping the territory according to ethnicity.

Although by decentralising power territorially one may avoid secession and maintain the borders of the State, the outcome is not different from partition, as both models create islands of homogenous groups, that is, segregated communities that do not cooperate with each other. Moreover, this model tends to create, perhaps indirectly, population transfers of those trapped in a territory which is no longer 'theirs'. Internal borders designed by culture exile those inhabitants that belong to a different culture and strive for the creation of monochrome groups. As Constantinou (2006) observes, by virtue of "heterogeneity" at the national level, this form of power sharing intensifies "homogenisation" at the ethnic level, "not only reinforcing cleavages and propagating ethnic nationalisms, but also in practically undermining ethnicities that unsettle the norm or transgress the logic of the system" (Constantinou, 2006:4). Hybrid identities which could transgress the essentialist identification of the sovereign groups are concealed. Individuals are led to choose an identity which is recognised politically and territorially, while there is no space for those who cannot be classified, for ambivalent groups, nor for narratives that could transcend the identities in conflict.

In Kosovo, one of the byproducts of decentralisation is the reinforcement of regionally based identities (Hardgrave, 1994; Kymlicka, 1998). Quite clearly, the attempt to separate the problematic communities by providing autonomy to the minority, has served to exacerbate mistrust amongst already largely segregated communities. The creation of municipalities along ethnic lines reinforces the geographical construction of ethnic identity. This institutionalisation of division

freezes ethnic identities on the basis of exclusion/inclusion policies. Recognition, Erk and Anderson also note, also heightens division by providing groups with the institutional tools (administrative and political autonomy in the case of decentralisation in Kosovo) to strengthen internal cohesion exclusively within their ethnic group (Erk and Anderson, 2010:2).

A decision-making process divided along ethnic lines and territorial boundaries may ultimately undermine the cohesion of the central government by resulting in political and legislative deadlock as certain secessionist municipalities or territories may be reluctant to work with the government or be actively working towards destabilizing the region as a whole (Jenne in Erk and Anderson, 2010:82). The effect and impact of ethnicity in politics is best exemplified in the voting patterns during elections, where support for candidates is closely dependent upon ethnicity. The issue, Simonsen (2005) notes, relates to the fundamental expectation of the population that only a member of their groups can best represent their interests; representation, as understood to be the essential characteristic of democratic ruling, thus becomes embodiment (Simonsen, 2005:300). Jenne (2010) also notes that in an ethnically divided electoral context, politicians and parties may feel compelled to compete for the votes of a single ethnic community, thus it becomes unlikely that they will promote ethnic moderation and far more unlikely that they will cooperate across ethnic lines (Jenne in Erk and Anderson, 2010:83).

On the practical side, decentralisation in Kosovo has not necessarily improved the quality of governance, as advocated by liberal-peace-builders. Kosovo Human Development Report 2010 demonstrates that local issues such as the quality of teaching has not improved where decentralisation has been implemented (KHDR, 2010)

The Kosovo Human Development Report notes that the implementation of decentralisation depends highly on institutional capacity: when funding is not sufficient, the institutional capacity is weak, and thus, decentralisation may simply reinforce social exclusion rather than closing the gaps. Municipalities in Kosovo lack the financial and human resources to implement social inclusion policies (KHDR, 2010:98). Municipality-specific funding, particularly in the case of funding granted

to Kosovo-Serb municipalities by Serbia according to the Settlement (CPKSS, 2007:Annex III, article 10), may carry political agendas of the donors. In this case it would be increasingly difficult to promote social inclusion provisions, especially in the case of funding from the government of Serbia, which may be subject to the influence of Belgrade's agenda. Serbia may in fact see the autonomy of K-Serb municipalities as a step towards secession thus encouraging the existence of parallel serb-led structures in an already administratively divided territory (Kallaba, 2010). Similarly, if the political message of Kosovo majority municipalities remains one of mistrust towards K-Serb communities, social inclusion appears unlikely to be implemented.

Place-making remains essential to the history of struggle for existence. Kosovo is no exception to this. If “place is defined by the concreteness of the experience of everyday life” (Entrikin, 2002:20), then decentralisation may be seen as a form of place-making that exacerbates exclusion, by presenting geographical places (municipalities, in this case) as a necessary condition for social existence.

Dividing territories into municipalities, and allowing for these municipalities the possibility of splitting further into smaller ones, as granted by the Settlement in Kosovo, may create ethnically homogenous local realities (Marcou in Ebel and Péteri, 2007:54), firmly institutionalised and fixed islands of ethnicity. This may render the very aim of peace-builders almost impossible, thus undermining the very creation of a multicultural Kosovo.

## *II. Two Alternatives to Territorial Decentralization: The Loop of Liberal Multiculturalism*

### *A. Non-territorial Decentralization: Continuing the Loop*

In order to overcome the determinism of the territorial decentralisation when it comes to reinforce ethnic cleavages, certain forms of decentralisation seek the resolution of ethnic conflict beyond the necessity to delineate internal borders, as inspired in Arend Lijphart's (1968; 1977) analysis of western diverse democracies

Lijphart consociationalism explains that under conditions of cultural fragmentation, political stability must be achieved through the cooperation of the elites' competing subcultures. Fences are not the sine qua non to have good neighbours. Rival - preferably homogeneous- subcultures should understand that to avoid the risk of political fragmentation, there has to be a common effort to transcend conflictive cleavages; a commitment led by the elites to cooperating and compromising, and ultimately building a stable democracy (Lijphart, 1969).

Consociationalism opens up new scenarios to decentralise power in order to be attentive to culturally different groups. It also brings prospects of peacebuilding resisting the territorial separation of diverse people. As Bauböck puts it, “why should regional nationality conflicts not also be settled by granting self-government rights to membership groups rather than to autonomous provinces? This would be a membership-based 'corporate federalism' instead of a territorial one (Bauböck, 2008:387)”. In a similar manner to the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires' organisation of minority communities, the alternative of non-territorial decentralisation asserts autonomy to individuals that, different from the majority, share a certain amount of ascriptive characteristics (Coackley, 1994). This alternative is attuned to those cultural groups which are not territorially concentrated, it resists the homogenisation of groups or the transfer of population, it preaches bilingualism and it is more respectful of culturally uncommitted individuals (Koralka, 1993). Because autonomy is not linked with a territory, this form of decentralisation ideally prescribes a form of multiculturalism in which culturally different citizens coexist in an heterogeneous state. While this form of decentralisation skips the reinforcement of conflictive identities that critics of territorial arrangements renounce, it is necessary to ask whether this model could actually guarantee a fair development of one groups' culture. In other words, while the absence of a territory eliminates claims of secession or sovereignty, it may be true that without a territory it is more hazardous to be attentive to the demands of certain groups.

By giving autonomy to competing groups, consociationalism could become a similar device to territorial autonomy, as it strives for the institutionalization of two competing groups that need to cooperate and accommodate divergent interests. Non-

territorial decentralisation still insists in the static dialogue between post-conflict cultures and it turns to be a zero-sum game that just optimistically wishes to resolve the conflict. This is clear in Bichku Parekh's book, which deconstructs Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis. Instead of 'clash', Parekh demands a 'dialogue' among civilizations and a dialogue between cultural groups that inhabit a same territory. He wants "both parties to take a critical look at themselves, build up mutual trust"(Parekh, 2008). To put it crudely, multiculturalists subscribe to Huntington's thesis but they are more optimistic. Instead of a clash, they strive for a dialogue between civilizations. The horizon of this debate, the limit that neither territorial nor the non-territorial forms of autonomy can surpass, is the existence of two groups that negotiate each other. In both formulas, the best option to an ethnic problem would be a comprehensive dialogue between groups that respect their difference.

When one identifies elements of consociationalism in racist systems, such as the former SouthAfrican Apartheid, it is easier to dismantle the violence entailed by an approach that emphasizes a dialogue among already anchored identity groups. As Coakley alerts, "it allows the ruling group to conduct its business free from 'contamination' by subordinate groups, while at the same time ensuring that such groups offer no territorial threat" (Coackley, 1994: 311). That is, consociationalism cannot escape the fixation of boundaries among groups and enables the possibility that minorities remain static, in a perpetual disadvantage. Like forms of territorial decentralisation, consociationalism sustains difference, but it freezes the identities of two competing groups, therefore, concealing beforehand, the continuous quest for identification as well as hindering the efforts to overcome the identities that led to the conflict. Therefore, to appreciate the fluidity of identity and overcome the static dialogue of conflictive groups, what is necessary is a form of non-racist discourse which surpasses the deficits of territorial and non-territorial decentralisation. Nevertheless, these new discourses still face the challenge of how to foster difference, if conflictive identities need to be overcome (see Norval 1996).

*B. Transcendence of Identities: Clossign the Loop*

Although decentralisation functions as a method to protect minority cultures and appease violence, a long term-solution is needed, which avoids the perpetuation of the identities in conflict. This may give way to shared institutions and promote the participation beyond ethnic lines (Monteux, 2006:180). In a post-conflict society, the aim should be to reduce the importance of the competing identifications; that is, to lessen the divide, rather than to reinforce it; this might be attained through the de-ethnicisation of politics and the building of institutions that operate across the different cultural groups (Simonsen, 2005).

Concentrating on cross-factional issues affecting all ethnicities may also demonstrate that irregardless of ethnic provenance, civilians seem to share certain common concerns. UNDP surveys highlight a convergence on issues such as unemployment, personal security, economic problems, education (UNDP EWR, 2010). Simonsen (2005) also suggests that to diminish the salience of ethnicity, it is necessary to promote cross-cutting cleavages instead of ethnic ones, thus demonstrating that there is room for individuals to pursue their self-interest outside the confines of their ethnic identities (Simonsen, 2005:306).

Horowitz's influential work (1985) criticises forms of decentralisation and strives for an integrative approach which encourages non-ethnic identities to flourish. Postwar institutions and policies should favour identities which overcome the static cultures of war. In Kosovo, where the ethnic cleavages impede an organic peace to succeed, the followers of an integrative approach demand to foster accommodation measures in a democratic and civic state (Hoxhaj, 2006; Kallaba, 2010). Different ethnic groups need to be integrated into a common citizenship identity in order to establish a settlement that goes beyond ethnicity. "Instead of decentralising Kosovo and leaving it mired with complex regional political problems, a better approach for Kosovo's future would be to help build a strong and authoritative central government capable of providing good governance and effective territorial control" (Kallaba, 2010:7)

However, a political community based on citizenship, instead of kinship, ethnicity or territory might not be sufficiently attentive to those minorities that suffer from arbitrary institutional disadvantages. Precisely because it tries to overcome competing differences, an integrative approach cannot protect differences and tends to support the views and cultures of the majority. In other words, to endorse political allegiances that do not rely upon fix groups means, perhaps unwittingly, to back up a majoritarian system that silences dissent minorities. The integrative approach exceeds the difficulties that decentralisation methods render, but it falls short when it comes to support differences, which is the *raison d'être* of decentralisation.

Thus, neither of the approaches already discussed can overcome the failures identified by others, as if the debate was foreclosed by an irreducible paradox. Minority rights are necessary to exercise ethnocultural justice, but the freezing of identities may never be escaped without a transcendent identity that in its turn does not do justice to the different cultural groups. One is then trapped in a liberal paradox in which on the one hand, one cannot sufficiently support difference, without reinforcing the tensions and differences that led to the conflict. On the other hand, if one wishes to transcend the competing identities with an encompassing identity, one is not caring for the different cultures.

The question still remains, how could one care for the difference or plurality of different individuals, without freezing or reinforcing the identities that are in conflict? Or how could one transcend competing identities, while still caring for the singularity of different individuals? What appears to be necessary is, thus, to reinvent new scenarios that allows for a reconceptualisation of solutions to ethnic conflicts and to go beyond the liberal debate about multiculturalism.

### *Conclusion*

The article has described the framework within which liberal multicultural theorists try to resolve the question of what to do in societies presenting ethnic conflicts. The conception of multiculturalism as a proposed solution to ethnic conflict demonstrates a particularly narrow understanding of diversity as well as techniques and strategies to manage it, and it becomes clear that liberal multicultural approach cannot escape the limitations of this looping framework.

Our paper has also argued that a narrow conception of multiculturalism based on the problematisation of ethnicity, as well as a conceptually tightly bound understanding of implementation under the territorial decentralisation project, has exposed the limitations of liberal multiculturalism as a conflict-resolution tool resulting in the paradoxical undermining of the construction of a long-term stable peace in post-conflict territories.

It has been the intention of the article, thus, to go beyond the liberal debate. Questions of caring for difference and plurality without freezing and reinforcing the identities remain essential to the understanding not only of how to resolve an ethnic conflict, but also of how to conceptualise and understand difference as well as the presence of two differing groups in the same territory. From the existing literature, a need seems to arise, to transcend competing identities, while still caring for the singularity of different individuals. What seems obvious, is the necessity to find new political and geographical imaginaries to reinvent politics in plural societies.

The case of Kosovo has shown how the challenge of implementing territorial decentralisation is now more than ever haunting the international community of States that have presented themselves as the sponsors of the liberal multicultural endeavour in the Balkans. As a strategy of peacebuilding and conflict resolution, this power-sharing project is not free from controversy, nor is it capable of being the panacea that liberal peace-builders advocated it to be.

What seems to be necessary is to step outside the loop of liberal multiculturalism, to go beyond not only the mere solutions offered to manage autonomy within an ethnically diverse territory, such as decentralisation, but also to conceive of difference as a state of being which is not necessarily and by default conducive to conflict, nor it is indeed the sole cause of instability. It is equally essential, in order to move beyond the limitations of liberal multiculturalism, to firstly move away from ethnocentric, paternalistic and fatalistic notions of difference and ethnicity, thus to be able to see difference not as a pathology. In the case of the Balkans, it is necessary to go beyond Popper's view of the Balkan States as being ruled by essentialist ethno-nationalism (Popper cited by Vlaisavljevic in Bjelic and Savic, 2002:194), beyond the general “assumptions of intransigence” identified by

Simonsen (2005) which depict the nature of ethnic divisions as being impossible to overcome (Simonsen, 2005:298), beyond Lapidoth's (1996) assessment of divided societies as being unreceptive to autonomy arrangements due to the extent of the mutual hatred and frustration (Lapidoth, 1996:29), beyond the pathologisation of the Balkans as barbarian and ruled by the passions of nationalism, into a form of Balkanism (Kiossev in Bjelic and Savic, 2002:179).

There is room for this, in Kosovo. Finding a common ground is vital.

Starting from already existing inter-ethnic relations may demonstrate that forms of communication and dialogue between ethnic groups is not simply possible, but also nothing entirely new. In Kosovo cross factional ties work well in the clandestine realm, for instance between smugglers of goods and people, especially during the war, or in businesses which employ a multi-ethnic workforce, or between former neighbours, friends and acquaintances who protected each other during NATO bombing campaigns and Serbian-led ethnic cleansing (Devic, 2006:267).

This calls for rethinking the concept of community altogether. What is required is a community which celebrates difference and is integrative and cares for the other at the same time. What is needed is to engage with a community that goes both beyond ethnic and cosmopolitan citizenship identifications. Only then it will be possible to conceive multiculturalism not as simply a means, a policy package, a magic bullet to kill the spectre of conflict, but rather to embrace diversity and ethnicity without freezing them into non-dialectical isolated islands, and as a consequence, to view multiculturalism as an end result within which difference is celebrated, not simply tolerated.

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