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Between Riga and Penang. Citizenship and Recognition of Cultural Difference in Latvia and Malaysia [Tarp Rygos ir Penango. Pilietybės sąvokos ir kultūrinių skirtumų pripažinimas Latvijoje ir Malaizijoje¹]

Santrauka

Straipsnyje lyginami du pilietybės modeliai. Analizė atskleidžia, kaip šios dvi skirtingos realios abstrakcijos veikia socialinį gyvenimą. Šiame straipsnyje, užuot apibendrinus pilietybės sąvoką, siekiama pabrėžti complex dialectic, t. y. sąveikų, kurios yra visų etnokultūrinių santykių pagrindas, sudėtingumą, nusakant kiekvieną didelės etnokultūrinės įvairovės išraišką. Pilietybės sąvoka dažnai vartojama kaip tautybės ir nacionalinės kilmės sinonimas, ypač Vakarų Europoje. Pastaruoju laikotarpiu ši sąvoka, iš esmės vartojama politinėje filosofijoje ir teisėje, pasidarė populiarė ne tik politologijoje, bet ir sociologijoje bei antropologijoje. Socialiniai mokslai „atrado“ pilietybės sąvoką tada, kai staiga ir netikėtai atsikūrė tautinės valstybės Centrinėje ir Rytų Europoje ir prasidėjo tariama Vakarų Europos krizė. Taigi pilietybės sąvokos nagrinėjimas turėtų padėti spręsti problemas, susijusias su istorinių arba teritorinių mažumų statusu Centrinėje ir Rytų Europoje bei imigrantų padėtimi Vakaruose.

Pilietybei dažnai priskiriama suvienijimo ir įtraukimo (inclusion) funkcija. Dėl tokio požiūrio susiformuoja vargu ar tikroviškas pilietybės vaizdinys, nes dažnai ji laikoma kone brolybės, lygybės, sutarimo ir pan. sinonimu. Sociologiniu požiūriu pilietybės kaip harmoningos politinės bendruomenės išraiškos pateikimas yra nelabai tikėtina abstrakcija. Pilietybė turi būti suvokiama kaip antagonistinis procesas plėtojantis varžyboms, įtampai, konfliktams, taip pat ir nuolatiniams deryboms bei kompromisams tarp grupių, įtrauktų į kovą dėl to, kad būtų pripažintos jų teisės ir skirtumai. Pilietybės sąvokos raidos nagrinėjimas sociologiniu aspektu atskleidžia tai, kad nėra bendrosios pilietybės teorijos. Juo labiau, kad istorinės struktūros ir esencialistinės (essentialized) kultūros konstrukcijos yra pernešy skirtingos, kad galima būtų plėtoti tokią teoriją ir bendrąjį pilietybės modelį. Tačiau pilietybių modelių lyginamoji analizė yra gana įdomi ir naudinga.

Šiuolaikinė Latvija ir Malaizija, kurdamos savo valstybingumą, pasirinko skirtingus pilietybės modelius. Latvijos 1991 m. Pilietybės įstatymas rėmėsi tautinės valstybės (Staatsnation) doktrina, pagal kurią linkstama nuslopinėti bet kokius kultūrinius skirtumus nacionalinės teritorijos viduje. 1956 m., pasibaigus Britanijos koloniniam dominavimui, Malaizija, pasirinko multinacionalinės pilietybės modelį, kuris akivaizdžiai pagrįstas šalies etninių skirtumų garbinimu. Ilgametis lauko tyrimas (fieldwork) Rygoje ir Penange, paremtas nagrinėjama pilietybės sąvoka ir su ja susijusia pripažinimo politika (politics of recognition), leidžia pateikti tokias išvadas dėl Latvijos ir Malaizijos. Antroji Latvijos nepriklausomybė yra reprezentatyvus atvejis, atskleidžiantis, kaip tautinės valstybės (Staatsnation) principas ir susijusi pilietybės sąvoka buvo vėl įgyvendinti, sakykime, šurkščiu arba ortodoksiniu būdu. Šiuolaikinės Latvijos tautinimas vyko veikiant Pilietybės įstatymui, kurio pagrindu iš šio proceso buvo pašalinti kiti. Tokia išskirtinė tautybės galia lėmė naujų ribų tarp etninių blokų atsiradimą ir atitinkamai – paralelinių visuomenių –

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Pagrindinės tyrimų sritys – politinė, ekonominė ir istorinė antropologija. Tarp svarbiausių publikacijų: *Die Betrogenen der Geschichte. Überlagerungsmentalität und Überlagerungsrationaltät in mediterranen Gesellschaften* (1992); *Es war einmal die Wende. Sozialer Umbruch der ländlichen Gesellschaften Mittel- und Südosteuropas* (1999, vienas iš redaktorių); *Bulgaria. Social and Cultural Landscapes* (2000, vienas iš redaktorių) ir *Baltic States. Looking at Small Societies on Europe's Margin* (2003, vienas iš redaktorių). Kartu su Ina-Maria Greverus įkūrė *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, šiuo metu yra žurnalų „Ethnologia Balkanica“, „Focaal“, „Etudes Rurales“ ir „Eastern European Countryside“ redakcinių kolegijų narys.

¹ Lietuvišką santrauką parengė dr. Alina Žvinklienė

protrūki. Jeigu artimiausiu metu Latvija norės atitikti Europos Sąjungos reikalavimus, ji susidurs su keliomis problemomis: pirmiausia – su ribų tarp etninių blokų ir paralelinių visuomenių panaikinimu, paskui – su adekvačiu skirtumų pripažinimu (*recognition of difference*).

Pastaruoju metu Malaizijoje bendrų susitarimų, įtvirtintų konstitucijoje, naujos ekonominės politikos, Vėžijos 2020 vertinimai gerokai pakito ir dažnai buvo prieštaringi, ypač dėl etniškai diferencijuotos pilietybės ir multikultūralizmo politikos. Tačiau nepaisant daugybės spragų ir bendrų susitarimų trūkumų, dinamiškas, sumanus, darbingas balansas buvo išlaikytas. Ypač turint omenyje tai, kad etniškai diferencijuotos pilietybės politika garantavo nacionalinių etninių komponentų susitelkimą ir parodė vertikaliąją socialinę stratifikaciją dėl labai nevienodų ekonominių galimybių. Galima teigti, kad tokia politika yra ne tik ekonominės sėkmės prielaida, bet keli pamatai vadinamajai padoriai visuomenei (*decent society*).

Malaizija gali atrodyti kaip Latvijos alternatyva. Nacionalinio tapatumo konstravimas ir pilietybės sąvoka buvo paremta etninio pliuralizmo ir multirasinės kultūros (*multiracialism*) idėja. Multirasiskumas kaip Malaizijos valstybės įkūrimo mitas ir pilietybė sulaiko įvairias bendruomenes nuo radikalaus nacionalizmo. Tačiau multirasiskumo mitas išlaikė ir įtvirtino ribas tarp bendruomenių. Taigi galima išžiūrėti etninio tapatumo esencializaciją (*essentialization*), kuri paskatino susidaryti etninius blokus.

Latvijos ir Malaizijos atvejai rodo, koks abstraktus ir netinkamas yra mono ir multi šalininkų ginčas. Iš tikrųjų mono ir multi priešprieša rėmėsi nekorektiškomis prielaidomis su radikaliai dualistiniais aspektais, tarsi visas gėris arba blogis būtų tik vienoje pusėje. Siekiant išvengti mono ir multi bipoliarinių spąstų, kalbant apie pilietybės koncepciją turi būti nagrinėjami reiškiniai su priešdėliu *inter* arba *trans*. Latvijos ir Malaizijos atvejais pabrėžė priešpriešos tarp konstruktyvizmo ir esencializmo beprasmiškumą. Naudingiau ne apsistoti ties šia dichotomija, o analizuoti socialinius procesus, vedančius link tapatumo konstravimo esencializacijos, netgi pasitelkus tokių konkrečių abstrakcijų kaip pilietybė institucionalizavimą.

Introduction: sociological aspects of citizenship

The term citizenship, which is often used as a synonym of nationality and national affiliation particularly in Western Europe, is essentially a concept used in political philosophy and jurisprudence. In this context, we should also add political sciences.

If we exclude Thomas H. Marshall's classic study *Citizenship and Social Class*, we can reasonably contend that citizenship is not part of sociology and anthropology's established terminology. In fact, in these two fields the notion of citizenship has come up only recently with the researches of Rogers Brubaker, Louis Dumont, and Immanuel Todd (Marshall, 1949; Dumont 1991; Brubaker 1992; Todd 1994). Furthermore, social science's discovery of the notion of citizenship must be viewed mainly in relation to the sudden and unexpected *come-back* to the national State in Central-East Europe and its alleged *crisis* in Western Europe. The term's present popularity in sociology and anthropology would then be the upshot of problems concerning the status of *historical* or *territorial* minorities in the Old Continent's Cen-

tral-East, and the immigrants' condition in the Western area.

We have noticed that over the last twenty years social science has taken up new concepts, proving that notions and questions regarding certain fields have quietly slipped into others, as highlighted by Prigogine and Stengers (Prigogine and Stengers 1979). The Dutch anthropologist Don Kalb has aptly analyzed why social science nowadays employs terms such as citizenship, trust, social capital, civil society etc. more often, although they are not customary in this field. This author has rightly noticed that social science's researchers must learn how to tackle the *concrete abstractions* produced by the international community, global organizations, national institutions, public and private consulting agencies, political and economic élites, etc. (Kalb 2002; 22). Consequently, sociology and anthropology must analyze how these *concrete abstractions* occur in empirical reality and which social processes and mechanisms they imply or induce.

Citizenship is undoubtedly one of the most

fundamental *concrete abstractions* produced by philosophers and jurists. It is particularly interesting for sociologists and anthropologists as a phenomenon that structures collective representations and social relations amongst individuals and groups. In other words, social science is concerned with citizenship mainly as an *imagined construction* that essentializes in social life. Though not a complete survey, we would like to present some major sociological aspects of citizenship, aside from the philosophical or juridical ones.

As stressed by the Italian sociologist Umberto Melotti, in the first place we must emphasize that citizenship is a juridical status granting a sum of rights and duties to members of a specific political entity (Melotti 2000; 35). Usually, this means a *modern State*, but we should not be too categorical on this point. In fact, we should remember that in a distant past there was a commonly accepted notion of citizenship quite similar to the present one; for example, the *poleis* in ancient Greece, Republican Rome, and the Italian medieval Comuni. Moreover, nowadays there are notions of supranational if not transnational citizenships as in the EU.

The notion of citizenship is definitely unlike that of subjection. The former involves a relation of reciprocal loyalty between an impersonal institution and its members. The latter instead, in force especially in absolute monarchy regimes or in *multicultural empires* -the well-known *Vielvölkerstaaten*- implies a personalized relation of obedience and submission of subjects to the sovereign. As Melotti notes, having rights (civil, political, social etc.) and not privileges differentiates citizenship from subjection (Melotti 2000; 35). In Weberian terms, we can add that citizenship is a typical phenomenon of legal-bureaucratic political systems while subjection pertains to traditional and charismatic ones. Using the terminology introduced by the Austrian historian Otto Brunner, we can remark that citizenship is a phenomenon related to the development of the *intitutioneller Flächenstaat*, while subjection is an indication of the *Personenverbandsstaat*

(Brunner 1968; 188 ff.). Obviously, these distinctions are modeled on ideal types according to the Weberian meaning of the term.

Over the past two centuries, the notion of citizenship has undergone an evolution studied by T. H. Marshall observing the United Kingdom (Marshall 1949). This analysis, which however must not be overly generalized, reveals how the *rights of citizenship* have ensued following a specific course. At first, civil rights concerning individual freedoms (personal freedom, freedom of thought and religion, besides the right to fair and equal justice for all) stemmed from the ascent of the middle classes in the 18th century. Afterwards, also due to the rising proletariat's social struggles, political rights, i.e. rights concerning the exercise and control of political power through the right to vote, were established in the 19th century. Finally, social rights, i.e. rights ensuring a degree of welfare and safety through welfare and educational services, were guaranteed in the past century. As explicitly or implicitly observed by authors of both *communitarian* (Taylor 1992) and *liberal* (Kymlicka 1995) background, a fourth type of right was added over the last twenty/thirty years; namely, cultural rights. Amongst these in particular there is the right to maintain and hand down to one's descendants cultural identity, ethnic affiliation, and religious belonging. Indeed, the heated debates regarding the *politics of recognition* and the vague and inchoate idea of *multiculturalism* concern the assertion or negation of these rights. Citizenship is a social process that takes place under specific historical conditions. Permanent dynamic is therefore one of its most crucial characteristics.

Cultural rights' recent unfolding in the constantly ongoing citizenship debate should not be regarded merely as being induced by the globalization or economic and political integration of vast areas that were once divided if not opposing. As far as Europe is concerned, the fact that cultural rights have been added only recently to the debate on rights concerning citizenship must also be viewed as a delayed manifestation due to the persistence of some ele-

ments of the continent's political-institutional structure. We should remember that forms of citizenships in which cultural rights are acknowledged *d'emblée* have been achieved in other parts of the world. We will deal with this later, analyzing the case of Malaysia.

The delay we have mentioned, which must be assessed for what it is, i.e. a matter of fact and not a lack, a shortcoming or even a fault, involves the principle of *Staatsnation*, a German term of French origin. This principle, which has characterized the Old Continent's history from the 19th century on – as stressed by Swiss historian Urs Altermatt and French jurist Stéphane Pierré-Caps – may be summarized as follows: *each nation must have its own State with its own territory and each State must comprise one nation* (Altermatt 1996; 53; Pierré-Caps 1995; 56). According to common sense and most theoretic representations, a *Staatsnation* is almost invariably conceived as a *Kulturnation* as well, i.e. a community whose members share the same cultural traits, particularly the same idiom. Paradoxically however, this corresponds roughly both to the Herderian idea of Volk, whose main characteristic is a shared language for all its members, and the French concept of nation, in which the linguistic criteria is again a major feature, as defined by the *Académie française* as well, in 1694. According to this definition, a nation comprises “*tous les habitants d'un même Etat, d'un même pays, qui vivent sous les mêmes lois et usant de la même langue*” (Lochak 1988 ; 77). If we should venture to draw some conclusions from these observations, we could reasonably assume that the *Staatsnation* principle postulates the formation of politically sovereign monocultural and/or monoethnic territorial spaces. We could challenge that the *Staatsnation* idea is based on *cultural and/or ethnic purity*.

This consideration seems backed by countless historical details, which can be neither specified nor analyzed in detail in this context. However, we can say that from the 19th century on, i.e. since the *Staatsnation* principle was applied in Europe, there have been repeated efforts to make the single national territories

both ethnically and culturally more homogeneous. To this day, these processes of *ethno-cultural recomposition* in the name of the *Staatsnation*, have been a dreadful and ongoing series (as the Kosovo warns us!) of boundary revisions, forced assimilations, banishments, planned immigrations, deportations, ethnic cleansings and wars, genocides, blood-stained secessions, etc. The inability and tremendous reluctance to face the problem of cultural and/or ethnic difference, i.e. the minority issue, within almost all national European States over more than a century and a half, should therefore be ascribed to the *concrete abstraction* of the *Staatsnation*. We should remember that to this day, as shown by the paradigmatic example of the *Minderheitenschutz* (minority protection) developed after WW I, there have usually been measures guaranteeing an unstable and unwilling tolerance without achieving a true recognition of difference (Veiter 1984; Vol.1, 20-29).

As Rogers Brubaker illustrates, the notion of citizenship in Europe is closely related to the political organization of the national States that have more or less applied the *Staatsnation* principle. Consequent to Brubaker's reasoning, we can determine the following points. The national State has far too often been understood exclusively as a geographic expression. Its sociological characteristics have repeatedly been left out. More particularly, the fact that the national State is a political association of citizens who belong to it even because of their cultural traits, which are either ascribed or vested accordingly, is often disregarded. Not everyone can indiscriminately belong to a specific national State and, to take a well-known formula of Max Weber, we can say that the national State is an association partially open towards the outside. Naturally, this limited opening towards the outside, i.e. towards the *other* or towards the *foreigner*, entails the creation of institutional mechanisms of social selection that regulate affiliation and exclusion (Brubaker 1992) Citizenship and nationality represent the fundamental tools that define who has the complete right to belong to a national

State and who is excluded from it.

Specific institutions, such as the *naturalization* process, notions as *assimilation* and symmetric concepts as *entitled nation* and *minority*, have been established especially to make this strict logic of inclusions and exclusions pertaining to the principle of *Staatsnation* more flexible. Almost intrinsically reckoned as culturally *other*, a foreigner can obtain citizenship through naturalization and assimilation, which coincidentally presuppose more or less voluntary processes that a sociologist would call *acculturation* processes and therefore a cultural affiliation change. Usually though, the foreigner has to forsake his previous citizenship, while the *dual citizenship*, though becoming juridically more widespread, is still regarded as odd if not dangerous for the preservation of national identities (consider the controversial debate in Germany). As far as minorities are concerned, we can say that they are granted citizenship *d'emblée*. However, the difference between entitled nation and minority implies a structural asymmetry, which conceals a partial exclusion and therefore a demarcation between first and second class citizens. Finally, as highlighted by Stéphane Pierré-Caps, there is a legitimate suspicion that granting citizenship or other rights to minorities by a State is chiefly a strategy to reserve a *droit de regard* on what happens to the State's minorities in bordering States (Pierré-Caps 1995; 46-50). Overall, once again we feel that, according to the *Staatsnation* logic, cultural difference within a State still denotes an irksome anomaly.

At this point, we ought to highlight that, with few exceptions, the debate on citizenship until now has been quite ethnocentric and/or more specifically Eurocentric. We can therefore agree with E. Isin when he stresses the *Orientalistic perspective* of many theoretical reflections on citizenship (Isin 2002; 117 ff.). Until now, these studies have focused mainly on societies and States commonly known as Occidental, whose democratic calling, rightly or not, is never or no longer challenged. United States of America, Canada, and Australia, and West European nations, especially

France, Germany, and Great Britain, are the subject of several social science researches, while the other parts of the world are practically forgotten or at least overlooked quite often. Such an *Orientalistic perspective* calls forth representations in which citizenship is an exclusively Occidental prerogative, while the *other* societies cannot attain it for want of moral virtues and/or rational qualities. US anthropologist Robert Hefner has rightly stressed that non-Occidental societies have their own history and thus their own specific way of facing the challenges concerning the difficult relation between citizenship and cultural plurality (Hefner 2001; 3). A sociology and anthropology of citizenship wishing to avoid Orientalistic perspectives can no longer avoid the comparative aspect.

However, this means the Occidental agenda based on liberal principles and ideals can no longer be regarded as the only valid one. Therefore, we must also understand the sociological circumstances that generated the various answers to the problem of relationship between citizenship and the right to difference, though complying with the basic norms of justice, individual freedom, and deliberative democracy (Hefner 2001; 4).

Finally, we must add that citizenship has often been ascribed a unifying and inclusive function (Isin 2002; 117). This view has produced hardly realistic representations of citizenship, which has far too often been regarded almost as a synonym of brotherhood, equality, harmony, agreement, etc. Sociologically, viewing citizenship as the expression of a harmonious political community is a hardly creditable abstraction. Citizenship must be perceived as an agonistic process with competition, tensions, conflicts, as well as permanent negotiations and compromises between the groups involved in the struggle for the recognition of their rights in general and those of difference in particular.

In the next part of this article I will compare by contrast two almost antithetical models of citizenship and analyze how two different *concrete abstractions* influence social life. I have chosen Latvia and Malaysia, where I am

still directing two field studies particularly in two cities: Riga and Penang. My choice has a pragmatic reason. After its *second independence*, Latvia has introduced a model of citizenship in 1991, following the *Staatsnation* doctrine that tends to stamp out any form of cultural difference within its national territory. Malaysia, after the end of the British colonial domination in 1956, has given itself a model of *multicultural citizenship*, which is unmistakably based upon the celebration of difference amongst the country's various ethnic components.

Citizenship in Latvia: the comeback of the *Staatsnation*. The case of Riga

The outbreak of the Second World War was the beginning of an especially painful chapter in Latvian history. It triggered an epoch of socio-economic changes in the country, which transformed the entire pre-war ethno-cultural structure. This process began during the National Socialist occupation, when the influential Jewish community, apart from those who managed to flee, was annihilated. Still notorious today are both the ghetto, set up in Riga, and Kaiserwald concentration camp, the dreadful place of extermination in a park at the edge of the city (Vestermanis 1996; 62 seq.). The subsequent Stalinist Sovietization policy, which not only meant the establishment of a political-bureaucratic apparatus on the Communist model, the collectivization of all sectors of the economy and forced industrialization, but also the expulsion of the Baltic Germans, the large-scale deportation of politically suspect Latvians and their replacement by Soviet citizens from the core republics of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, contributed decisively to recasting the ethnic make-up of the region.

The Stalinist *mobility policy* continued long after Stalin's death, even if the goals had changed. The settlement of *Slav* incomers in the Soviet Republic of Latvia and particularly in Riga was carried on for economic and military reasons almost until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Thus between 1959 and 1979

the Latvian population of the Latvian Soviet Republic declined by 9%, while the *Slav* share (Russians, Belarussians and Ukrainians) increased by 9% during the same period. The change was particularly macroscopic in Riga (Schlau, 1990: 238). Here the proportion of non-Latvian inhabitants became so large that it became a small majority even to this day. In this context, we must add that citizens of the non-Baltic republics regarded migration to Latvia as a privilege, above all because working conditions and quality of life were better than in the remainder of the Soviet Union. To be transferred to Latvia and especially to Riga, the Baltic city with the Western atmosphere, was a dream for many Russians, Belarussians, and Ukrainians, which they tried to realize at any price. Hence, it is not surprising that under the conditions of Soviet *mobility policy* – as confirmed by the statistical data – Riga developed into a binational city. It was essentially composed of two *parallel societies*, which lived separately from one another and ignored one another: the Latvians and the *Slavs* (mainly Russians). The Latvians felt the increasing presence of immigrants as an unacceptable superimposition and simultaneously a dangerous threat both with respect to ensuring socio-economic opportunities and their socio-cultural identity preservation. This was not only because the Russian, Belarussian, and Ukrainian immigrants got privileged treatment from the almost omnipotent Soviet local bureaucracy, which itself consisted largely of *foreigners* and was regarded as the administration of the *occupiers*. Under the protection of Soviet power, the immigrants did not feel obliged to familiarize with and respect Latvian *specificity*. In everyday life they could act as if the Latvians were a *quantité négligéable* up to the period of so-called *perestroika* in the 1980's, when a very cautious and ambivalent recognition of Latvian identity became apparent among the Soviet rulers. Learning the local language or taking an interest in the native society and culture was not heeded necessary. The Soviet *mobility policy* in Latvia, with its underlying and at the same time paradoxical aim of creating a *homo*

sovieticus through Russification, in fact established the ideal conditions for that polarization and confrontation between ethnic groups that can be observed in Latvia today.

Latvia's second independence not only meant re-introducing free market economy and Western-style parliamentary democracy, but also the inflexible adherence to the idea of an ethnic *Staatsnation*, with no regard for the country's particular ethnic structure. Its re-establishment hardly represents a *royal road to Europe*, where meanwhile attempts are being made to carefully reconsider this institutional form of political community. It is, rather, a case of a nostalgic *return to the past* or – to be more precise – of a return to the 19th century. In Latvia, the present-day public discourses of identity and ethnicity of the reborn entitled nation sound an explicitly archaic and Romantic note, in which the attentive observer can find echoes of Herder. Concepts as *Volk* (people), *Volksgeist* (spirit of the people), and *Volkseele* (soul of the people) are customary again (Giordano 2000; 121).

At the same time, the territorial principle is exalted and the spatial claims of the nation are consequently accorded a vital importance. The aim of the establishment of the *Staatsnation* principle in Latvia, and the specific ethnicity discourses that go along with it, is to revitalize the theme of *monoethnic territoriality* - all official protestations with respect to the recognition of cultural otherness or minority rights notwithstanding. This occurs largely via language, which once more proves to be a major symbolic identity resource. At present around 40% of Latvia's population and more than 50% of Riga's population is of Slav origin. Since 1994 however, laws have been repeatedly passed in parliament, or proposed, which authorize the Latvian language alone, even in commercial transactions (cf. article 7 of the proposed language law of 1995, which has meanwhile been dropped after massive pressure from the European Union and Russia). A police authority, the *Language Inspection Board*, was even set up to protect the Latvian language. Especially in Riga, it strictly supervises the maintenance

of *linguistic obligations*. These measures naturally also provided for the *Latvianisation* of the whole educational system, with the result that Russian-language schools were treated as a sort of *discontinued model*. Closure was delayed until the last students had taken their final examinations. At the same time a radical and meticulous correction or removal of bilingual road signs, shop signs, and street names of the Soviet period, took place in Riga. Anything that bore testimony to the Russian language or Cyrillic was carefully removed or erased.

In conclusion, we must add that the new élites would undoubtedly have taken much stricter language policy measures, had it not been for the constant admonitions of the European Union and the brusque warnings of Latvia's large and powerful neighbor.

At present, in the name of the nation state and the monoethnic nation state, sections of the population, which were in part born in the country (50% of non-Latvians belong to the second or third generation of *Slav* immigrants) are being deliberately ethnicized, principally through the language criterion, in order to refuse them citizen rights and exclude them from civil and economic society. Whoever does not belong to the state nation, has no political rights, and is barred from practicing important professions, for which the linguistic standards required by the law are especially stringent. An observant look at the current situation in Riga and Latvia shows that the establishment of the monoethnic nation state principle has created, in European terms, a unique category of stateless persons, which makes up more than one third of the whole population, and which is officially, and somewhat hypocritically, described as *permanent resident*. Provided with a special *passport*, they are branded as non-citizens. Two alternatives are open to them:

(re-)migration to the ethnic *motherland* that would amount to *soft ethnic cleansing*, which is indeed what the Latvian authorities intend and hope for, or more or less compulsory assimilation into the entitled nation.

The case of Latvia and especially that of Riga

shows how with Soviet *occupation*, under the guise of Communist internationalism and on behalf of an undeclared Greater Russian nationalism, the pre-war period *multiculturalism* was systematically weakened. The rigid, almost obsessive adherence to the *Staatsnation* principle after the *second independence*, has continued to dampen or prevent the development of a *politics of recognition*, which could have guided negotiations on the acknowledgement of the various identities both at the institutional level and in everyday life. Up to now, Latvia is still very far indeed from accomplishing that accommodation between ethnic communities with equal rights or that “*integration without assimilation*” postulated by Asbjørn Eide, president of the UN working group on minority rights, (Eide 1997; 7-19).

However, everyday intercultural relations between members of the various ethnic groups have become much less tense in comparison with the early nineties. Despite a citizenship model that does not recognize or tolerate ethnic difference, *intercultural communication* in Riga between members of the different *parallel communities* is beginning to be a perceptible reality at level of everyday life contacts.

Citizenship in Malaysia: from plural society to multiracial nation. The case of Penang

When we talk about *plural societies*, we use a term introduced by John S. Furnivall, an acute British colonial administrator known until now for his analyses regarding the structure of societies in Burma, Indonesia, and implicitly Malaya (including Singapore).

According to this author, a *plural society* is characterized by *two or more elements or social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit* (Furnivall 1944; 446).

For Furnivall, the only circumstance linking these different social orders or, better yet, ethnic communities sharing the same territory, is economy and, more specifically, the sheer exchange of goods. The predominant relation

among the various groups was therefore material, entirely utilitarian, and lacking a social and/or symbolic tie bearing witness to common values and ultimately a shared identity. According to Furnivall, this link based exclusively on economic considerations, and not on *common values, mutual solidarity, and fellow-feelings*, is weak and quite unpredictable however, as far as a society's cohesion is concerned. Plural societies are practically fated to be social configurations in which a generalized warfare reigns, since the indiscriminate pursuit of personal economic profit is not curbed by a *shared citizenship* framework (Furnivall 1944; 451). For these reasons, social disorganization and political uncertainty constantly threaten plural societies. From a current point of view, Furnivall's position can certainly seem questionable

Furnivall apparently disregards that *plural societies* in the end are the upshot of European *political engineering*. This means that actually these specific social configurations are the deliberate outcome of British and Dutch domination in the region. The British and Dutch colonial systems, certainly not so innocently, established their power especially in Southeast Asia by applying the *divide et impera* principle. Therefore, creating parallel societies based on spatial segregation and on the construction of an inevitable ethnic difference was an effective way of governing, legitimated by the rhetoric of having to be there to prevent the worst. In the last part of the above-mentioned excerpt, we can detect this *philosophy* of necessity even in Furnivall, although he was very trenchant about some racist representations upheld by colonial administration top men. Furnivall's assumption was that colonizers had come upon *plural societies* on their arrival, as these had always existed in that area (Hefner, 2001: 6). The exact opposite is true instead because colonial power had urged immigration policies, especially for the Chinese and the Hindu, which deeply altered the aspect of societies in existence before the Europeans' arrival.

To illustrate the above, we need only mention the Chinese community in Malaysia, pri-

marily the one in George Town (Penang). George Town, by now known as Penang, was founded in 1786 for strategic reasons by the British East India Company on the island of Pulau Pinang (at the northern entrance of the Strait of Malacca). Penang, formerly renowned as the *Pearl of the Orient* and now renamed *Silicone Island* because of its active electronics sector, enjoyed an immediate economic success. Between 1786 and 1819 on several occasions the British not only tolerated but also encouraged immigration coming from all over the world (Chinese, Indians, Burmese Malay, Thai, Javanese, Bugis from Sulawesi, Aceh from Sumatra, as well as Armenians and Jews, etc.). However, even after 1819 when growth slowed down due to the trade decrease caused by competition with Singapore and the drop of international prices for pepper, Penang was still a sought-after destination for potential immigrants. In fact, George Town's population rose from 6,000 inhabitants in 1820 to 29,000 in 1824. In 1851, the city already numbered 43,000 that became 60,000 in 1860. After this date, Penang enjoyed another phase of economic growth favored by the opening of the Suez Canal (1869) and the extensive introduction into Southeast Asia of the *Hevea brasiliensis*, i.e. the India rubber tree. For British Malaya, and primarily Penang, this meant a striking sequence of succeeding migratory flows from all over China and southern India. Between 1860 and 1915 Penang became one of the most important platforms from which immigrants then spread throughout the region to work on India rubber plantations or, more specifically, in Malaya's zinc mines. Again, colonial administration strongly encouraged the influx chiefly of Chinese and Indians. The former were held in high esteem for their presumed *Confucian ethic*, while the Hindu (especially of Tamil origin), due to their diligence and honesty, were considered *quite useful people* (Leith 1804; 25). These positive representations must be juxtaposed to the negative ones concerning the autochthonous population, i.e. the Malay, who had a terrible reputation among the British, as the following passage

written by one of Penang's earliest governors proves:

"The proportion of the Malay inhabitants is fortunately very small [at Penang, Chr. G.] as they are indolent, vindictive treacherous people ... incapable of any labour beyond the cultivation of paddy and fit for little else but cutting down trees (Leith 1804; 25).

However, within the remarkable range of motherlands of those who came to Penang, China is undeniably the greatest supplier of immigrants. In colonial times they were a very heterogeneous group from both a social and a cultural, i.e. religious and linguistic, point of view. Besides social disparities within the community that sprang from different causes linked both to the time of arrival and the previous status in the society of origin, the George Town Chinese belonged to five creeds (Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, Muslim, and Christian), and at least eight linguistic groups (Küchler 1968; 89). Therefore, it would be deceptive and misleading to speak about a close-knit national community in a period that includes the entire 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century.

During the first half of the 20th century however, with the impending decolonization led mainly by the British, the Chinese in the entire area, particularly in Malaya and the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca, and Singapore), underwent a process of *ethnonationalization*. Basically, this evolution towards the shaping of a community with a distinctly ethnic quality is the result of three conditions. The political engineering of British colonial rule, which, as already mentioned, aimed at encouraging the ethnicization of all the different so to say *national* groups in the Malay protectorate territory and in the far more geographically limited one of the *Straits Settlements*.

The direct or indirect influence of the powerful nationalist movements that rose in the first part of the 20th century especially in mainland China. We should recall that Sun Yat Sen went to Malaya and lived in Penang for a short while, and that his well-restored house is one of the city's most popular lieu de mémoire, es-

pecially for the Chinese community.

The corresponding and more or less simultaneous self-ethnicization of the other numerically more relevant groups (Malay and Indian), already begun in the mid-nineteenth century by the respective political and intellectual élites chiefly with a British background or trained in Britain. Therefore, the ethnicization of the Chinese cannot be conceived without considering the construction and spreading of the concepts of *bangsa* and *kebangsaan melayu*. The former means *race* in a very restrictive and exclusive sense and the latter *Malay nationality* with a more inclusive sense, therefore contemplating acculturation, actually assimilation, and, from a legal standing, the naturalization of the *other* (Milner 1998; 153-165; Shamsul 1998; 138-142).

Being *bangsa* or *kebangsaan melayu* meant above all being Muslim and then speaking a specific language and sharing certain customs such as the complex wedding ceremonies that fundamentalist groups nowadays forcefully reject as unislamic. These processes of simultaneous *self-ethnicization*, especially in the last phase of the colonial period, clearly reveal one group's strong fears of another group's potential supremacy (Milner 1998; 156 ff.).

Through these three *ingredients*, we can observe what Dru Gladney has called the *making majority* of the Malays to which we need to add the *making minorities* of the Chinese and Indians (Gladney 1998; Milner 1998; 163 ff.). While decolonization was becoming increasingly viable, one could detect a process of crystallization and consequently of essentialization of ethnicity which would engender the almost dogmatic representation of what is known with a touch of irony as the *ethnic trinity* comprising Malays, Chinese and Indians. This trinitarian view is still one of the sociopolitical myths on which present-day Malaysia is based.

If this reconstruction of the progressive shaping of a plural society in Malaya is correct, then we can say that on the verge of independence the founding fathers of this State based on the relics of British colonial rule had to face societies in which *ethnicity* permeated

economic, social and political relations at all levels of the public sphere, i.e. from the national to the local and daily one. This implies that these social configuration, very close to *plural society's* ideal type, were characterized by a spatial separation among the system's various groups, each with its institutions and infrastructures; a division of labor on an ethnic basis which corresponded to social inequality among individuals. Especially in Malaya, there was a strong correlation between ethnic belonging, social status and economic standing (Shamsul 1998; 142). We shouldn't overlook that even within each group, due to obvious socioeconomic inequalities among people, we can detect a specific layered structure.

To illustrate this reality we will take another look at the *city* of George Town at the brink of decolonization. The Chinese lived mainly in their specific districts and most of them, who were mainly businessmen, shop-keepers and artisans, lived and worked in the city's center, i.e. the renowned *Chinatown*. Sources indicate that within George Town's Chinese districts there was a correlation between place of origin and occupation (Küchler 1968; 92 ff.). Thus, the Cantonese were chiefly goldsmiths, barbers, carpenters, and construction hands, while the Hokkien's fields were boat and shipbuilding, India rubber and fish commerce. The Hokkien along with the Hainanese and the Hokchiu also worked in catering. The Teochews and Hakka were chiefly farmers, but the latter were almost the sole owners of pawnshops. Finally, the Henguas mainly dealt with tire and auto repairs (Küchler 1968; 93).

The Indians (prevalently Tamil), if they were not working and living on India rubber plantations outside the urban center, lived in their own district still known as *little India* and their activities are mainly small businesses, the most conspicuous being textiles retailers (Küchler 1968; 100).

George Town Malays instead lived in *kampong* on the outskirts of the city and were employed in farming, especially in rice growing (Küchler 1968; 103 ff.). In 1957, Britain definitively withdrew from the Malay peninsula

and the three *Straits Settlements* (Singapore, Malacca, and Penang). Its place was taken by the independent Federation of Malaya (renamed Federation of Malaysia in 1963). Because of its ethnic diversity, the new country faced the difficult problems of choosing a suitable model of statehood and citizenship. Two concepts were developed in this context: a *Malayan Malaysia* and a *Malaysian Malaysia*, strongly backed above all by Singapore's élites (Hill and Lian 1995; 60). The first model stood for a *classical* nation state asset with the Malays as the entitled nation, in which the other groups were allowed, at best, the role of national minorities. Within the framework of the discussion of a *Malayan Malaysia*, the question was even raised whether granting citizenship to Chinese, Indian and other immigrants or native groups (for example the Dayak of Sarawak) was appropriate. From the start, even the way in which the issue of the non-Malay's statute was presented highlights that the equivalence between nationality and citizenship (so familiar to us) was implicit in the concept of Malayan Malaysia. The idea of a *Malaysian Malaysia* on the other hand, proposed a more *open* and *inclusivist* concept of nation and citizenship, as Bellows aptly points out:

A Malaysian Malaysia means that the nation and the state is not identified with the supremacy of any particular community or race (Bellows 1970; 59).

This model therefore took into account the polyethnic and/or multicultural structure of the country and acknowledged all ethnic groups on the federation's territory at independence as members of the political community with equal rights. After fierce debates, a very cautious variant of *Malaysian Malaysia* was at last agreed upon. But on what type of interethnic negotiations is the latter version based upon?

The constitution of 1957 represents the core of a consociative-like *identity bargaining* that has created a very specific type of *ethnically differentiated citizenship* (Hefner, 2001: 28) based upon the fundamental distinction between *natives*, i.e. Malays, and *immigrants*, i.e.

non-Malays. Since the Malays are economically and professionally the most disadvantaged group, they have been granted a special statute concerning economy, education, and property rights (especially about the land). They have specific territories reserved to them, special regulations with respect to commercial licenses and concessions, and quotas in higher education (see articles 89, 152 and 153 of the Constitution of Malaysia). Non-Malays (in particular Chinese and Indians) were granted full Malaysian citizenship as well as some rights of religious and linguistic expression within a secular State in which Islam however is the State religion. This institutional compromise, as two experts of this region as Milton J. Esman and Robert W. Hefner have aptly pointed out, is the outcome of defensive strategies that can be ascribed to reciprocal fears and mistrust, which still characterize Malaysian society's different ethnic communities (Esman 1994; 57 ff.; Hefner 2001; 23).

Which fears troubled the different ethnic communities? The Malays, being *bumiputera*, i.e. *sons of the earth* and therefore *natives*, were afraid that, due to their obvious socioeconomic inferiority, they would be overcome by the Chinese and Indian enterprise and suffer the miserable plight of *North American red Indians* as some members of their élites stated literally (Esman, 1994: 53). The non-Malays instead worried about the future of their flourishing economic activities and their cultural identity in a State with a strong Islamic connotation.

At this point, we need to add that within the framework of this constitutional compromise public life goes on respecting ethnic-religious boundaries. In view of these boundaries, non-Malays have nearly tacitly accepted the political preeminence of the Malay community in exchange for their own economic supremacy. This is why Arend Lijphard speaks about *hegemonic consociationalism* in Malaysia (Lijphard, 1977: 5). However, consider that this asymmetry is far from complete, or speaking about consociationalism would be misleading. In fact, the federal government has always been a coa-

lition of three ethnic parties, the *Nasional Barisan*. Moreover, it is not unusual that representatives of the *Malaysian Chinese Association* (MCA) and the *Malaysian Indian Congress* (MIC) serve as ministers, although key ministries are always held by representatives of the *United Malays National Organization* (UMNO). Therefore, the office of Prime Minister is customarily entrusted to a Malay. However, he must be able to be acknowledged as a leader by all communities, prove he can play the role of *great mediator* in case of interethnic conflicts that could trouble the nation's unity.

Over the years, the compromise elaborated by the constitution has proven obsolete and on several occasions new forms of negotiated agreements have changed the character of Malaysian *ethnically differentiated citizenship*. Despite contrasts and permanent tensions among the various communities, a collegial and consensual solution has always been reached. Thus, after the May 1969 *ethnic riots*, a New Economic Policy was launched granting further social rights to Malays whose socioeconomic situation over the twelve years of independence had worsened compared to middle and higher strata, which mainly include non-Malays (Faaland, Parkinson and Saniman 1990; 17 ff.; Gomez, 1999; 176 ff.).

In 1991, after a period of sensational and dizzying economic growth, which, apparently at least, somewhat lessened social differences between Malays and non-Malays, the coalition government launched the project *Vision 2020* whose principal goal is to finally establish a *bangsa malaysia*, i.e. *a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny* (Hng 1998; 118). Politically, this will mean bringing about a *consensual, community-oriented democracy* (Hng 1998; 118) guaranteeing the existence of a *tolerant society in which Malaysians of all colours and creeds are free to practise and profess their customs, cultures and religious beliefs, and yet feeling that they belong to one nation* (Hng 1998; 119).

Practically, this means that even in the future Malaysia will be a pluriethnic and/or multiracial entity based on the consensual separa-

tion between *natives* and *immigrants*. However, the concept of citizenship becomes more inclusive through the concept of *bangsa Malaysia* that joins the various communities into a single civic body. Finally, through the *pursuit of excellence*, *Vision 2020* introduces a less ethnic and more meritocratic idea of citizenship. Under this aspect, Malaysia resembles Singapore's model of nation based on the combination of two founding myths, i.e. *multiracialism* and *meritocracy* (Hill and Lian, 1995: 31-33). Under these very complex political-institutional auspices, quite specific forms of intercultural coexistence were developed locally and in everyday life, as the example of Penang clearly shows.

Today George Town is a city of more than 220,000 inhabitants (60% Chinese, 30% Malay and 10% Indian) in the middle of one of Malaysia's most important industrial centers (tin industry). While the old basic structures and divisions of the colonial *plural society* have not completely disappeared, they have weakened. Today we would look in vain for the old spatial separation between the ethnic groups, which used to characterize the settlement pattern of George Town so clearly: it no longer exists. Those Chinese who have become wealthy, have moved away from the old town, taking up residence in luxurious detached houses or apartments in the *better* districts. The Indians, who today have mixed with the remaining Chinese in the old town, have taken their place. The Malays have in part left their Kampong-like districts, and live in cheap apartment blocks along with members of other ethnic groups. The division of labor produced by the *plural society* is very far from being as rigid as it was in the past. Many Indians, having been successful in trade, now belong to the affluent middle class. Many Malays as well have risen considerably on the social ladder. Nevertheless, the Chinese remain very much the dominant economic group. Because of social mobility, which has led to a labor shortage in low status jobs, Penang has once more become a place of immigration. Thus, until the Asian crisis of 1997-98, migrants mainly from Indo-

nesia and Burma worked for small and large companies in the industrial and service sectors subject to very precarious contracts.

The transformations in the social structure, which, as already mentioned, significantly altered the *plural society* inherited from British colonial rule, have not destroyed the tolerant, though not unproblematic, co-existence between ethnic groups. An American observer, who compares the atmosphere in Penang with that in the USA, bears witness to that. In the introduction to her book, she writes - with a degree of naive optimism:

“It is the work of a native New Yorker for whom urban racial tensions seem all too normal and who found in Penang, where diversity and harmony are not mutually exclusive, a sense of hope” (Hayes Hoyt 1997; vii).

The *exoticizing* and/or *orientalizing* gloss on the actual situation in Penang displayed in this text cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, it is a fact that in Penang the spirit of accommodation and *identity bargaining* – while retaining, of course, porous ethnic boundaries, spatial divisions, and social strategies of distancing – which the Malaysian constitution evokes, is very evident. This may be illustrated not only by the frequent intermarriages or the educational system, which allows a broad linguistic pluralism particularly in private schools, but also by so-called *multicultural* local policies regarding public self-representation and hence also the preservation of architectural and historical monuments.

Thus, it is no coincidence that the municipal museum was opened in 1997 with an exhibition bearing the memorable title: *“They came to Penang from all over the world”*. An accompanying catalogue was also published, in which the historically developed ethnic-cultural diversity was deliberately enacted. It is difficult to avoid the impression that both in the exhibition and in the catalogue there is an over-emphasis on the *multiculturalism* of Penang. For example, there is a pronounced and somewhat nostalgic expression of good will towards ethnic and cultural differences that belong more

to the past than to the present. In this case *multiculturalism* is first of all conceived and then celebrated with something of a sense of mission. The whole enterprise of the exhibition and the catalogue is intended to underline Penang’s *multiculturalism* as a fundamental value and a virtue and not as a deficit. Conservation policy conveys the same message. For more than ten years - after a modernization phase typical of the Southeast Asia countries, in which with an iconoclastic fury all reminders of the past were destroyed or left to rot (cf., for example, the destruction of Singapore’s old Chinatown) - the historical inheritance, above all in the shape of old buildings, is being increasingly valued. Thus in Penang guidelines have been formulated for the restoration of the most important buildings (houses, temples and mosques). It is interesting to discover that this conservation policy was once again based on the principle of accommodation and identity bargaining. The monuments to be restored were carefully chosen according to criteria that could be described as *multicultural*. The symbolically most appropriate and aesthetically most representative buildings for the history and culture of the Chinese, Malay or Indian community were chosen as worthy of restoration, considering the ethnic composition of Penang. The conservation of historic monuments can therefore be regarded as the result of skilful negotiation, ultimately producing an ingenious arrangement that helps avoid the latent and always impending *struggle for recognition* between the three ethnic groups constituting the society of Penang.

Conclusions

With reference to the concept of citizenship and the possible *politics of recognition* associated to it, what can we determine from two such diverse cases as Latvia and Malaysia?

The *second independence* of Latvia is a representative case of how the *Staatsnation* principle, as well as the notion of citizenship connected to it, have been reintroduced in a so to speak *crude* or *orthodox* way. The comeback

of the *Staatsnation* principle in Latvia (and also in Estonia), with its particular discourses and practices of citizenship, aims at revitalizing the “monoethnic territory” ideal rather rigidly, despite official pronouncements regarding the recognition of minorities’ rights. Such meticulous efforts to achieve a monoethnic State, may be explained by the traumatic experiences of foreign rule under the Soviet Union. The already mentioned wave of Russian immigration to the Baltic area, which aimed at the region’s Russification and provided quite favorable working conditions for immigrants with good professional qualifications, was undeniably perceived by the native as “occupation” or “domination”. Viewed from a sociological standpoint, the situation could be described as the installation of a foreign dominant class on top of the existing social structure: a situation that remained unacceptable to the native. It is also possible that the Soviet annexation of Latvia and the other Baltic States had no basis at the level of international law because it was based on the supplementary secret protocols from the *Hitler-Stalin Pact*. This was declared “*legally invalid and void from the moment of its signing*” by the Commission for the political and legal assessment of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939, appointed in 1989 by the Soviets. The outcome however was that almost three generations of immigrants could be legally stigmatized as *occupants* with no right to citizenship. Certainly all these considerations have a legal basis and a psychological explanation. Nevertheless, from a sociological viewpoint, Latvia at present is a country whose society, due to specific *concrete abstractions*, has been ethnicized by decree excluding the *other*. Such a *power of the exclusive ethnicity* has caused a fresh outbreak of the boundaries between *ethnic blocs* and therefore of *parallel societies*. Finally, we need to highlight that, besides ethnic separation, there is also a condition of political disparity and socio-economic stratification.

If in the near future Latvia should wish to be compatible with the EU, it will have to face the problem of *abating ethnic blocs* and *paral-*

lel societies in the first place, and then the problem of an adequate *recognition of difference*. This could be achieved even by changing the national State’s framework; i.e. by modifying the concept of citizenship through the principle of subsidiarity and promoting *consociational democracy* structures based on *power-sharing*, as suggested for example by the political scientist Arend Lijphart (Lijphart, 1995: 275 seq.). Of course, this does not imply that problems regarding interethnic and intercultural coexistence are solved at last and can be dispatched.

Assessment of the consensual agreements anchored in the constitution, the NEP, and the Vision 2020, have varied greatly and were often contradictory, particularly concerning the politics of ethnically differentiated citizenship and multiculturalism. Some authors emphasize that the different negotiations led to the supremacy of the Malays, which amounted to the unadulterated political hegemony of the Malay community over the Chinese and Indian (Shamsul, 1998: 145 ff.). Other political committed experts in Malaysia complain however that the constitution, the NEP, and the Vision 2020 have not been innovative enough. Apart from the absent British ruling stratum, in the post-colonial context they reproduce and perpetuate the old *plural society* with its spatial separations, social inequalities, as well as its economic dualism between Malays and non-Malays (Faaland, Parkinson and Saniman, 1990: 18 ff.; Milner, 1998: 165 ff.) More specifically, these authors highlight above all the constant socioeconomic predominance of the non-Malay compared to the Malay population that makes up the lower and socially weak strata of society. From a more neutral point of view, however, we can say that the different negotiations and compromises concerning the ethnically differentiated citizenship, as well as the national policies conducted in their spirit, until now have always sought to achieve a *modus vivendi* between ethnic pluralism and economic dualism. In fact, despite many defects and gaps and defects of the consensual agreements, a dynamic, subtle, laborious balance has been maintained within the society inherited. Con-

sider that the politics of ethnically differentiated citizenship has guaranteed national cohesion between ethnic components displaying vertical social stratification due to very unequal economic chances. Any evaluation of this politics should bear in mind the pertinent question put by political scientist Milton Esman: without such a consensually negotiated model of ethnically differentiated citizenship,

Would the <...> Malays have been willing to tolerate the consolidation of Chinese economic and professional hegemony without resorting to violence that would have been far more costly to non Malays than the regime of moderate discrimination that was actually implemented? (Esman 1994; 74).

If the answer to Esman's question is no, then we can say that this politics not only is an important prerequisite of an economic success regarded by many as outstanding, given how the country got over the 1997 crisis, but has also laid at least some foundations for what the Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit has called *decent society* (Margalit, 1996).

Given how Malaysia has managed its various problems regarding ethnic plurality, at first it could appear as a paradigm set up against Latvia. This would be the expression of a naive and superficial view of the reality. In fact, the Malaysian case is much differentiated and the presentation regarding Penang is only one of its aspects. Both the national identity construction and the notion of citizenship are based upon the idea of ethnic plurality and *multiracialism*. Thus, a State ideology and several social practices in *line* with it, that mark-

edly celebrate differences, have ensued. Quite often, there is a veritable folklorization of difference. *Multiracialism* as founding myth of the Malaysian State and citizenship has certainly avoided the various communities' flight towards forms of radical nationalism. In this context, we can mention the case of the Chinese who could have allied with their motherland's most extremist movements but were loyal to their country of residence instead. As our researches in Penang show as well, under the auspices of multiracialism the following have developed at a local level and in everyday life:

"Interculturalism, documented by an increased commensalism, intermarriages and inter-community businesses and postethnic associations called *interest-based organizations*." (Shamsul 2001; 208-209)

Nevertheless, the myth of *multiracialism* has on the other hand maintained and entrenched the boundaries between communities, a legacy of the colonial regime, especially in certain rural areas and on the outskirts of large cities such as Kuala Lumpur. In these, therefore, we can detect an essentialization of ethnicity, which, according to local experts, has given rise to *ethnic blocs*.

This presentation wants to emphasize the complex dialectic underlying every expression of ethno-cultural plurality, rather than suggest valuable solutions concerning a generalized citizenship model. Solutions are always easy but deceptive. Therefore, I would be glad to have created a feeling of productive confusion, literally, a brainstorm.

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