Torsten MORITZ

Identity and Integration:

Overcoming Dualistic Thinking in Dealing with the "Other"

A man who had not seen Mr K. for a very long time,
greeted Mr K with the words:
"You have not changed at all."
"Oh," said Mr. K and turned very pale.
(Berthold BRECHT: *Geschichten vom Herrn Keuner*)

In important areas of debate, the socio-political discussions in Europe reproduce and circle around two concepts, which are mainly applied in a dualistic logic: the concept of identity (particularly the preservation and defence of it or the loss of it) and integration. Let me take first two examples of my everyday work experience in the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), which illustrate and underline this aspect.

ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The process of European political integration will be taking another step forward with the enlargement of the European Union in May 2004. At that time, ten countries, mostly from the former Communist block, will join the EU. It was and still is one of the central reference points of this process to underline that all countries will be allowed to maintain their own cultural, national and linguistic identities in the process.

One of the most striking examples of this high respect for diversity is the linguistic question. From May 2004 onwards every official EU event will require translation into the then twenty-one official languages of the Union. Some of these languages are spoken by less than a million people in a Union of 450 million inhabitants. However, it was never seriously questioned that maintaining this linguistic diversity, as the most visible expression of cultural diversity, was a central aspect of a successful European integration.

At the same time, in negotiating access to the EU, candidate countries were required to fulfil a number of political and economic criteria and accept a whole range of regulations, laws and provision in force in the EU member states. This included measures which would improve the legal and social conditions of national and ethnic minorities in these countries. These measures should enable national or ethnic minorities in these countries to maintain their identities.

MIGRATION IN EUROPE

The area of migration and the question of how to deal with migrants is another central area of debate in most countries of Europe today. The question of integration is one of the most controversial topics in this debate. The exact lines of debate are very different from country to country. However, certain arguments appear in most countries of Europe. Migrants are generally expected to "integrate" into their host society, by learning the basics of the language of the country as well as acquiring a certain level of knowledge about the social, political system and history of their host country.

There is a trend to oblige migrants to follow "integration courses"; in a growing number of countries this is the pre-condition for receiving financial or other forms of state support. Irrespective of the success or failure of these measures, there is a widespread discourse which claims that "integration has failed", especially because there are "parallel societies" of migrants – eg. migrants are concentrated in certain parts of a town, run newspapers in their own language, have specialised shops etc. The fact that communities maintain their own identity in this case is seen as a failure of integration, a threat to the community at large.

IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION: A CONTRADICTION?

In both cases we are speaking about identity and integration. In both cases we see one common aspect: "newcomers" are expected to meet certain requirements and in return acquire certain rights. The logic of these two examples, however, is very different if it comes to the question of identity. Whereas the preservation of cultural, linguistic, and national identity is in the case of EU enlargement seen as a key indicator of a successful process of integration, the fact that a particular national or ethnic group is maintaining its own identity is in the case of migration perceived as the clear indication that integration has failed.

These examples illustrate that an approach which operates with dualistic understandings of identity (keep it or lose it) and integration (someone is integrated or not integrated) and even sees identity as opposed to integration is too simple to make us understand social processes around identity and integration.

RECONCILIATION OF IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION: UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES …

Neither the concept of identity nor the concept of integration is clearly defined. Indeed, if we look around in "our" generation (people in their twenties and thirties), we see how different the concepts of identity are. In the countries of Western and Northern Europe an individual approach probably plays a very important role: belonging to a certain group or subculture. (As with any general descriptions, it is clear that it cannot do justice to the many different tendencies.)

The job which someone performs, or even the fact that one is unemployed, very strongly shapes one's identity. Max WEBER argued that this is stronger in countries, where the Reformation shaped the culture.

National identity plays a role in most countries. In my perception, the feeling of a national and cultural identity, however, is stronger in those countries and regions which were or felt oppressed by other countries and regions in the past: we will certainly think of the former communist block, but certain regions in Belgium or Spain are also striking examples.

In a number of countries, belonging to a certain social class shapes one's identity. Gender identity is something very strongly felt by many of us, others have a strong reli-

gious identity. This explanation about identity raises the question if the idea of maintaining or losing one's identity (as a dualistic either-or option) can explain how individual and collective identity is constituted.

... DISTINGUISHING IDENTITY AND STEREOTYPES ...

If we question the notion of one static and unchangeable national or cultural identity, it is quite evident that we also have to reconsider a certain notion of integration, one which describes integration as assimilation: a process of an individual or a group integrating into a certain culture or country which remains unchanged during this process, by exactly reproducing the (supposed) identity of this culture or country.

Anecdotes about migrants who tried to integrate through assimilation underline this: the Hindu refugee who upon arrival in Denmark asked to be baptised into the Christian Church, the Indian migrant who upon arrival in England invited his working-class neighbours to attend elaborate tea drinking ceremonies, which he administered with greatest pride, or the African exchange student who on the first day in a German university turned up in leather trousers. Similar cases can be reported about Europeans who established themselves to live in other continents.

All these incidents by way of being a caricature illustrate that assimilation does not mean real integration. They also hint at the fact that the self-concept of a culture and country or the perception of this culture or country will often have little to do with reality. I for example find it hugely ironic that most often Christian conservatives, who most strongly denounce the feminist movement in the churches, underline that the role of women in Islam is the aspect which blocks the integration of Muslims into European societies.

WSCF Europe Activities in 2004

26 January – 2 February 2004
ERC MEETING
Svätý Jur, Slovakia

4–8 February 2004
GROWING EU: HOPES AND FEARS OF MEMBERS AND CANDIDATES
Central European Subregion (CESR) Winter Seminar
Linz, Austria

20–22 February 2004
NORDIC WINTER MEETING
Copenhagen, Denmark

24 April 2004
SEMINAR ON GLOBALISATION
The Netherlands

April 2004
YOUNG PEOPLE AS AGENTS OF CHRISTIAN–MUSLIM INTERCULTURAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
Consultation in view of the Thematic Conference
Brussels, Belgium

7–13 June 2004
WINDOW ON THE WORLD: ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, AND POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN EUROPE AND LATIN AMERICA
WSCF Europe Thematic Conference
Agape Ecumenical Centre, Prali, Italy

5–11 July 2004
CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN OUR INNER LIFE AND IN COMMUNITY
CESR Summer Seminar
Pápa, Hungary

June to September 2004
LINGUA FRANCA SUMMER COURSES
Various locations in Central and Eastern Europe

August 2004
TRAINING EVENT JOINTLY ORGANISED BY LINGUA FRANCA AND THE CESR
Czech Republic

2–7 of August 2004
CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGIES IN EUROPE
Nordic Summer Meeting
Finland

18–25 July 2004
THEOLOGY AND GENDER
Agape Theological Camp
Agape Ecumenical Centre, Prali, Italy

5–14 August 2004
TALITHA CUM: ARISING TO LIFE IN ABUNDANCE
WSCF General Assembly
Chiang Mai, Thailand

August 2004
GLOBALISATION, HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY
Agape Political Camp
Agape Ecumenical Centre, Prali, Italy

18–24 July 2004
CIVIL SOCIETY AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES IN EUROPE
ESG International Ecumenical Student Meeting
Waldsieversdorf, Berlin, Germany

September 2004
EUROPEAN STAFF MEETING
Budapest, Hungary

September 2004
YOUNG PEOPLE AS AGENTS OF INTERCULTURAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
WSCF Europe Thematic Conference
Oslo, Norway

October 2004
INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE
TEAMS (Through Ecumenical Action More Sharing) Consortium Workshop

… ACCEPTING CHANGE AS NATURAL

In my view, both identity and integration can only be described in a meaningful way as something in a concrete moment and a concrete situation. Both the person the group wants to integrate as well as the culture and country into which integration happens undergo constant changes of their identity. Along with other elements, integration will be something which changes and needs to involve both sides, the integrating person and group as well as the country and culture of the integration.

In this context, it is important to see how much cultures in most of Europe have changed over the last decades. The stories of countries with huge national minorities abroad (as people who previously migrated and settled, or who were cut from their homelands because of the changing of the borders) illustrate this: it is a common feature that ethnic groups in a minority situation preserve a culture which in the "homeland" might not exist any longer. Very often this leads to a culture shock and massive social problems when the groups go "home". They have not been part of the change in the self-concept of a culture or country and feel left out.

THE NEED FOR SPACE, BALANCE AND CONFIDENCE IN ADDRESSING IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION

Thus, the challenge in dealing with identity and integration lies in balancing integration and mutual reconstruction of identity. But is there a clear definition of what we could in this context see as a successful process? As frustrating as this might be, the definition of what exactly constitutes a successful integration, through which individuals, countries or cultures reconstruct their identities, is something which we cannot draw up before a process, but only afterwards. If we cannot give a standard definition of a successful process of integration and reconstruction of identity, can we at least have favourable preconditions? As outlined above, accepting that the integration and reconstruction of identity is a two-way process seems helpful.

Another aspect is illustrated by something, which an Estonian friend once told me: "In Estonia over the last five hundred years we always had to defend our identity against occupation in order to survive. That feeling still prevails. People are very conservative. In Germany, you do not need to have that – with 82 million, you know you will always be there!"

This rather typical remark underlines another important precondition: none of the partners participating in the integration and reconstructing of identity should have a reason to fear what will happen, which means that we need space to develop and time to digest change. So the conclusion is that there is not one conclusion. If we want to overcome dualistic thinking, we must live with the realities that some important certainties in our lives are called into question, without other certainties taking their place.

Suggested Reading

ASMUS Sören, *I is an Other – Dialogue as First Theology, Emanuel Levinas and Henning Luther as Sources for Ecumenical Theology*. Dublin, 1996.

Danish Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, *Cultural Diversity in European Cities*. Hague, 2003.

Commission of the European Communities, *Communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Immigration, Integration and Employment (COM 336)*. Brussels, 2003.

MORAES Claude, *Report on COM 336*. www.europarl.eu.int.

Torsten MORITZ (1969) is a (United) Protestant from Germany. He is doctor of political sciences and served as the Vice-Chairperson of WSCF Europe from 1995 to 1997. He lives in Brussels where he works for the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and worships in the St. Andrew's Church of Scotland. His email is moritzt@yahoo.com.