

Deconstructing Mythological Foundations of Ethnic Identities and Ethnic Group Formation: Albanian-Speaking and New Armenian Immigrants in Switzerland

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Scholars generally agree that ethnicity often serves as a vehicle for mechanisms of social inclusion or exclusion and is interwoven with the structures of nation-states. This article aims to contribute to the ongoing debate about ethnicity and highlights the inherent dilemma of essentialism using two empirical case studies—Albanian-speaking migrants living in Switzerland and newly arrived Armenian migrants who left Armenia after independence in 1991. By directing attention to the processes of boundary construction, as well as to the relative and situational character of ethnicity, the paper shows how representations of collective ethnic identities are formed, transformed, reformulated or shifted to other representations of collective identities. By analysing the degree of reification of ethnic identities, it becomes clear that the ladder from ‘soft’ to ‘hard’ essentialisation has many steps. Furthermore, the case studies reveal that, in contemporary Switzerland, other categories are relevant for social exclusion or inclusion as well, mainly the type of residence permit and professional qualifications—categories which are also interwoven with ethnicity.

Keywords: Ethnicity; Albanian Migrants; Armenian Migrants; Switzerland; Social Exclusion

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Introduction

Epistemologically, technical terms such as ‘*ethnology*’ or ‘*ethnography*’ suggest that ethnic groups are universal, or that they have always existed. The terms further tempt us to believe that the organisation of human beings into ethnic groups is natural. However, nowadays most social scientists consider these ideas to be out-of-date. The deconstructivist approach culminated in an anti-essentialist academic attitude, which can be summarised as follows: nothing is ‘naturally given’ and ethnic, cultural, national or gendered essences do not exist. In this line of argument, the often-evoked ‘crisis of representation’ in social science during the 1980s generated a vast number of new and valuable insights into the mechanisms of how history and reality are viewed. In addition, it left us with the understanding that, academically, ethnicity should not be regarded as ‘the’ given basis for group formation, but ‘only’ as one among several others on which collective identities can be formed. But still, we are confronted with a central dilemma, which always arises when dealing with the notion of collective identities on an analytical level: on the one hand, most social scientists agree that collective identities and collective action generate a form of communality, which is fundamental to all forms of human society or social groups. On the other hand, collective action inevitably produces ‘we-formations’ on the basis of essentialised identities (Elwert 1989). Representations of these ‘we-groups’ are internalised in cognitive and affective patterns and externalised in social institutions (for example, Turkish women’s associations) or territorialised boundaries (for example, a nation-state). The dilemma is that, without these essentialised collective identities, ‘we-groups’ lack continuity. With this dilemma in mind, it does not come as a surprise that in everyday conversation, policy analysis and media reports, and sometimes even by researchers and academics, ethnic groups are treated as discrete, concrete, tangible, bounded and enduring collectivities. However, ‘making’ history and emphasising similarities is one of the fundamentals of ethnic collective groups. Mystifying ethnicity through the establishment of a direct line with the past is one of the constituting elements of this collective behaviour. Without this, ethnic groups would simply lose their *raison d’être* (Eller 2002).

Contemplating ethnic groups or ethnicity is further complicated by the fact that every ‘we-group’ also generates a ‘they-group’, since communality not only encourages participation on the inside, but also raises barriers against participation from the outside (Elias and Scotson 1965). Processes of inclusion and exclusion are therefore inevitably interwoven with the formation of all sorts of collective identities. Boundaries of this kind may sometimes be visible, as in the case of territorially organised political communities. In other cases, boundaries may only exist in people’s minds, as is often the case with the ones producing social differences (Wicker 1997). Scholars tend to agree that the notion of ethnicity has historically become increasingly important within the context of modern nation-state formation. In this context, ethnicity was, and is, directly linked to processes of social inclusion or exclusion. With the creation of modern nation-states, the status of belonging to a

specific ethnic group, for instance to a minority or a dominant ethnic group, started to determine access to the rights and services which the modern state is supposed to guarantee (Mackert 1999). If we use the proposed ideal-type distinction between 'civic-republic' and 'ethnic' nations (Brubaker 1992), it is clear that the latter has ethnic origins. But the ideal of a 'civic' nation may not exclusively rely on 'civic' boundaries as a criterion of membership; it can be based on ethno-cultural semantics as well. Most Western states have engaged in the process of promoting a common language, which, in return, promotes a sense of common membership; this is true even for countries like France, which represents the ideal type of a 'civic' state. However, the way ethnicity and nation-state formation are linked, and the influence this has on social inclusion and exclusion, varies greatly in time and place. We can conclude that majorities within states are not less 'ethnic' than so-called 'national' minorities. Moreover, we can conclude that such differentiated forms of social inclusion and exclusion occur in 'ethnic', 'civic' and 'multiculturalist' states (Kymlicka 2000). Furthermore, one issue which is central to this article is that these mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion related to the modern state not only have an impact on 'national minorities', but also on immigrants in general and on 'foreigners' as citizens of a state other than the one they currently reside in. Living in a 'host nation' means not having the same rights as other citizens and being deprived of a set of specific, both concrete and symbolic, resources.

For instance, Switzerland is known for its multicultural character with regard to its national minorities: Switzerland is defined as a federalist and pluralistic nation, embracing German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic speakers, as well as religious pluralism. The Swiss nation is termed a 'voluntaristic nation' (*Willensnation*). This 'republican' nation is held together by direct democracy, multiculturalism and federalism. Various groups, which, in modern language, are defined as ethnically, religiously and linguistically different (German-, French-, Italian- and Rhaeto-Romanic-speaking groups), live in separate territories (with the exception of some bilingual cantons), forming a complex political system, which represents all groups equally in its federal institutions. But when it comes to foreigners and immigrants, we might even apply the term 'ethnic minority' to those (speaking German, French or Italian) who are excluded from the 'voluntaristic' nation, based on laws tying citizenship to national descent according to the *ius sanguinis* principle (Wimmer 2002). Another form of exclusion has been exerted through the categories used in admission policy: from 1989 onwards, Switzerland replaced its relatively liberal admission policy—at least for non-EU citizens—by a more restrictive one. EU citizens are more and more freely admitted, whereas for non-EU citizens, the new policy offers educational and work opportunities almost exclusively to highly qualified foreigners. Immigrant integration on the other hand follows a path of cultural assimilation. Cultural diversity is not an objective. In this sense, with regard to its immigrants, Switzerland represents an ethnic-assimilationist state model (Guigni and Passy 2003). This is true not only for the more 'republic'-oriented cantons of the French-speaking part of Switzerland, but also for the more 'ethnic'-

oriented German-speaking cantons. Last but not least, the attainment of Swiss citizenship remains quite difficult, as it is not only based on the *ius sanguinis* principle, but also on the often arbitrary and only implicitly formulated criteria of assimilation (Achermann and Gass 2003; D'Amato 2001; Wicker 2003).¹ This is reflected in three referenda (1983, 1994, 2004) in which Swiss voters rejected laws that would have made naturalisation easier for immigrants' children.

For most Swiss citizens it is obvious that 'the Swiss' are far from being a homogenous group with an overarching collective identity; in fact they are pluralistic and diverse on different levels. Many are quite conscious of this dilemma, which is inherent in the notion of a collective identity as described above. Notwithstanding this, the Swiss tend towards 'groupist thinking', as Brubaker (2004: 35) calls it. This means that, in the context of immigration, ethnic or national groups are regarded as fixed variables and group formation of immigrants along ethnic lines is taken for granted. In other words, in public discourse and the media—and sometimes even in the scientific domain—the tendency exists to refer to groups such as Turks, Muslims or Albanians, as if they were internally homogeneous and externally bordered and as if each group's members form a unitary and collective group, with a common purpose and a common culture. It even seems, if I may put this in a slightly ironic way, that these ethnic or national groups form a kind of extended arm of their 'naturally' and territorially defined ethnic or national origin. In this way, ethnic groups or communities are transformed into transnational ethnic groups (Dahinden 2005a). The further away these groups are from their original national territory, the greater their 'cultural distance' from the Swiss is perceived to be (Castles 1994).

By presenting two empirical case studies, I would like to contribute to the discussion on ethnicity and its interwoven net of inclusion and exclusion processes. The first case study concerns Albanian-speaking migrants in Switzerland, the second Armenian migrants who left Armenia after 1991.

Frederik Barth (1969: 9–10) highlighted—four decades ago—that empirical research on the characteristics of ethnic boundaries produced two discoveries. First, it is clear that boundaries persist, despite the flow of people that cross them. This means that categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but entail social processes of exclusion and inclusion. Discrete categories are thus maintained, despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories. Secondly, one finds that stable, persistent and often vitally important social relations are maintained across such boundaries, and are often precisely based on the dichotomised ethnic status. For some time now, studies that analyse the processes of ethnic boundary development or other group formations by discussing their dynamics with ethnic groups within a nation-state, or with immigrant groups, have been published (see for instance Baumann 1996; Hagan 1998; Waters 1990). The case studies presented in this paper contribute to this discussion by focusing on the processes of the opening and closing of ethnic boundaries.

Brubaker (2004: 37–8) has suggested that thinking on ethnicity, race and nation should occur in terms of practical categories, cultural idioms, cognitive schemata, discursive frameworks, organisational routines, institutional forms and political projects. In this article, I will attempt to show how the ‘practice’ of ethnicity and ethnic-group formation is taking place in the two cases. I will also discuss the links to processes of social inclusion and exclusion. If we regard ethnicity as a ‘practice’, we will also be of the opinion that different actors participate in this practice and, therefore, that ‘ethnic action’ depends on contextual, as well as on structural, cultural and cognitive factors. Next, I will consider how social relations shape these constructions of ethnicity or nationality and how multiplexities of belonging are expressed. To expound the above-mentioned, I will discuss the degree of essentialisation of the representations of collective identities and I will show that the ‘stairway’ leading from ‘soft’ to ‘hard’ essentialisations has many steps. The data I present will furthermore allow us to think about the role the state plays in these processes of weakening or strengthening essentialisations.

Framing Categories of ‘We-Group Formation’: The Example of Albanian Immigrants from Former Yugoslavia

In my first case study I will focus on the dynamics of ethnic boundary formation of one specific group by highlighting the relational character of ethnicity. Furthermore, I shall investigate whether these group boundaries coincide with a behaviour of solidarity. The group in question is the Albanian-speaking immigrant group from former Yugoslavia currently living in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Albanian-speaking migrants are one of the most important immigrant groups in Switzerland, both in terms of numbers as well as in terms of public debate. As Yugoslavia has been a traditional recruitment region for Switzerland’s so-called guestworkers for some time, Albanians from former Yugoslavia have been working in Switzerland since the late 1960s (Von Aarburg 2002). However, with a shift in immigration policies in Switzerland, specifically the implementation of the so-called ‘three-circles’ model in 1991, the recruitment of workers from former Yugoslavia was no longer possible: they were soon categorised as members of the third circle and had no possibility of obtaining a work permit (Swiss Federal Council 1991). From this point onwards, people from former Yugoslavia could only immigrate to Switzerland through family reunification or by seeking asylum. Confronted with both economic hardship and increasing political unrest at home, the guestworkers slowly abandoned their plans to return, and decided instead, if they could, to bring their families to Switzerland. Consequently, a steady increase in the number of Albanians from former Yugoslavia was witnessed in Switzerland through chain migration. Politically motivated immigration started as well: members of the nationalist elite among the Albanian students were increasingly persecuted and forced to leave Kosovo (Malcolm 1999). Europe, and above all Switzerland with its established Albanian community, witnessed the arrival of the first asylum-seekers from former Yugoslavia. The civil

wars within the different republics of ex-Yugoslavia and the outbreak of the war in Kosovo in 1998 led to a phase of mass migration. Out of all the asylum-seekers entering Switzerland between 1992 and 1999, 42 per cent were from former Yugoslavia, among them many Kosovars (Efionayi-Mäder *et al.* 2001). It has to be mentioned, however, that many of these asylum-seekers returned to Kosovo after the war, often favoured by return programmes.

For this case study I conducted semi-structured and in-depth interviews, as well as an analysis of 40 migration networks of Albanian-speaking migrants in Switzerland and of 11 returned Albanians in Kosovo (for details see Dahinden 2005b). The interviews in Switzerland were conducted in 1999 and 2000, those in Kosovo in 2001, at the time of reconstruction.

I concentrated on three moments in the migration process, focusing my analysis upon the role of social relations in the context of the decision to migrate, the social-support networks of Albanians in Switzerland, and the role of social relations in reintegration after a person had returned to Kosovo. The interviewees were heterogeneous in terms of gender, origin, time of arrival, type of residence permit and working situations. Although all the interviewees were immigrants of the first generation, they experienced highly different migration histories; for instance there were asylum-seekers as well as guestworkers, as they arrived in Switzerland at different times during the last 30 years. This network perspective and the in-depth interviews are appropriate for identifying the importance of ethnic ties and the formation of ethnic boundaries within Albanian migration networks.

The results of the interviews and the network analysis reveal interesting insights into our theme. Most importantly, it can be observed that the boundaries of ethnic group formation among Albanian-speaking migrants have constantly changed during the migration process. I think the metaphor of a jellyfish which constantly changes its shape, without losing its 'content' but by transforming its permeability is a fitting analogy to describe these processes. The question here is who is considered as being 'ethnic Albanian'? Does this boundary coincide with sociologically observable solidarity towards and among the members?

At first glance, it might be paradoxical that Albanian ethnic boundaries have never been as encompassing as during the war of 1998 in Kosovo. During this time of crisis, everybody who could somehow be classified as 'Albanian' got his or her place inside this jellyfish of collective group identity. The relevant borderline was the 'other', the Serbs. It appears from the interviews that the boundaries of ethnicity, and at the same time of solidarity, included all Albanian speakers, independent of their citizenship. This is reflected by the following example. The people who were interviewed and who left Kosovo just before or during the war often reported that they received support from different people during their journey from Kosovo to Switzerland. This support mainly came from unknown persons and almost exclusively from other Albanian-speakers originating from Montenegro, Albania, Italy and Macedonia. One interviewee told me:

I wanted to go to England to my brother. But it was too expensive. I arrived at the Swiss border out of money. There I met an Albanian, who had come to pick up someone, and I asked him to lend me 200 Swiss Francs. I promised him that my friend in Switzerland would pay him this money back, but he did not want it. He just gave me the money.

Others reported that these Albanian speakers helped in a variety of ways: they gave financial help, let them sleep in their houses, provided important information or just let them use their telephone to contact another person. We might conclude that in this case of political crisis and growing nationalism, a kind of ‘bounded solidarity’ emerged that was directly linked to the criterion of ‘speaking Albanian’ and the idea of an ‘Albanian community of destiny’. Here, the most important category for classification was language, not religion, and never citizenship. Scholars have pointed out on different occasions that, in the case of the Albanians, language is the most important criterion for the construction of ethnicity (Draper 1997). We will see that in other contexts this criterion is not valid, but during the war it was within these boundaries of language that ideas about mutual solidarity and reciprocity were activated, and had direct consequences for social action. In fact, some of those interviewed would probably never have reached Switzerland without the help of these ‘altruistic Albanians’.

The situation is quite different once the migrants arrive in Switzerland. At first glance, the ethnic criteria and, in particular, language still have high relevance for group formation, but sometimes these criteria are substituted by other categories of classification. We might speak of an ethno-linguistic group, which is highly fragmented on the inside, leading to a jellyfish that disintegrates and forms new and smaller jellyfish.

The analysis of 40 support networks of Albanian-speaking migrants reveals strong ethnic homogeneity. Albanian migrants from former Yugoslavia mostly turn to other Albanians for social support. Almost three-quarters of the reference persons mentioned by the interviewees on the questions regarding social support (72 per cent, or 228 out of 317 named reference persons) were also Albanian-speaking. Albanian-speaking immigrants rely on other Albanians when they need general advice about professional or familial affairs, economic or emotional support. Leisure time as well is spent with other Albanian speakers. One woman interviewed told me:

If my husband does not work at the weekends we go to visit the family—my brother-in-law or my own brother. I have also three Albanian friends I met on a language course. We meet once a week to talk.

In addition, Albanians turn to other Albanians to find a job or an apartment. Swiss and other nationals are addressed mostly concerning questions of integration. This means they are mobilised when migrants require information about administrative affairs, translation opportunities, information about school, etc. I think it is not an exaggeration to say that Albanians in the region of Zurich have reached a critical mass. In fact, it is possible for them to rely almost exclusively on people of the same

language origin for social activities, different kinds of support and information about available jobs or apartments. On the basis of the results of this study, the picture of an 'Albanian community' emerges which is almost hermetically closed and—at least the first generation of migrants—quite disconnected from Swiss society. Thus, the network perspective gives the impression that group formation along ethnic lines is highly relevant.

The phenomenon of ethnic homogeneity in social networks of migrants is well known (e.g. McPherson *et al.* 2001). This case study of the Albanians shows that they are not an exception, but there might be other explanations for this apart from the idea that ethnic-group formation is 'natural'. We have to ask whether the observed ethnic homogeneity in the realm of social support is formed on a voluntary or an enforced basis. Do the Albanian-speaking migrants only trust their 'own people' and therefore turn almost exclusively to other Albanians, or do they not have access to others or the opportunity to create ties and relations with people outside the Albanian community?

Migration research tells us that the first generation of immigrants often remains dependent on relationships with persons of the same background, mainly because of language difficulties. Moreover, mutual aid among persons sharing similar migration experiences remains important for adjusting to a foreign environment. Hence, preferring partners of the same ethnic or linguistic background may result from everyday practices of adaptation, and could be interpreted as being of a voluntary character. In this context, length of stay in the foreign country, as well as sequencing of generations, are apparently important factors for the dissolution of ethnic and linguistic communities. This argument was originally put forward by early assimilation theorists (Gordon 1964), but is now contested in contemporary research. In general, studies show that the second generation has fewer reference persons of the same ethnic or linguistic background than the first generation (Bolzmann *et al.* 2003; Nauck *et al.* 1997; Wimmer 2004,). Ethnic homogeneity could be a strategy for better adaptation to a new and alien environment, as migration experiences and linguistic background can serve as a kind of social capital (Portes 1998).

In particular, the relatively 'forceful' nature of the Albanian migration from Kosovo could also offer an explanation for the conditions of isolation and strong ethnic homogeneity. If going abroad involves escaping repression from another 'national' or 'ethnic' group, as was the case for the Albanian-speaking migrants who left Kosovo in the 1980s or 1990s, and if it involves being able to be 'more Albanian' in the new host country, then capitalising on the ethnic connection is logical behaviour. Growing nationalism and politicisation of ethnicity in the Balkans has also had its effect on established communities in immigration contexts. This also contributes to a growing consciousness and essentialisation along ethnic lines within immigrant communities. In this perspective, the ethnic homogeneity of immigrants is therefore directly linked in a highly interwoven world to events taking place in geographically quite distant areas.

The ethnic homogeneity of the social networks of Albanian migrants might also be explained by their under-privileged position in comparison to other immigrant groups and by their limited personal resources, particularly in terms of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1983). It is well known that many Albanian immigrants in Switzerland are confronted with important problems of marginalisation and poverty. The unplanned and unforeseen family reunifications caused the Albanian population to multiply within a short time. Whereas previously the Albanian-speaking population in Switzerland had consisted of predominantly single and male workers sending remittances home, the situation was quite different and rather more harsh for the members of these groups after family reunification. Some live in precarious circumstances and many are unemployed, especially women. In general, we might say that the socio-economic and professional status of members of this group is presently very low and mechanisms of exclusion based on discrimination can be observed (Fibbi *et al.* 2003; Maillard and Leuenberger 1999; Wanner 2004). This could indicate that ethnic homogeneity sometimes goes hand-in-hand with ethnic segregation as regards social class. Ethnic organisation could, in this case, be interpreted as social exclusion in terms of social class and segregation. The organisation of immigrants along ethnic lines therefore may not be a voluntary process, but rather reflect the class structure of society. We-group formation may rely on socio-economic factors and on processes of social exclusion. We could even speak of ethnic segregation.

But no matter what explanation or explanations are valid for the situation of Albanians in Switzerland, it is important to emphasise that this ethnic homogeneity of social support networks does not have the effects in everyday practice that we might expect: for instance, this ethnic homogeneity should by no means be mistaken for ethnic solidarity. Also if a group is homogeneously composed of almost exclusively Albanian-speaking persons, this group is not internally homogenous; on the contrary, there are clear lines of division. Within the networks of Albanians and within this 'Albanian community' we find different types of dividing lines, different 'we-and-they' groups and different 'insiders and outsiders'. These categories of inclusion and exclusion are almost never absolute, but often overlap, and they have an effect on daily life. First, we can detect tendencies of homogeneity based on type of permit, age and gender. This means, for example, that Albanian asylum-seekers get support from other asylum-seekers, whereas Albanians with residence permits tend to be supported by other Albanians with residence permits. Albanians with residence permits support asylum-seekers to a much lesser extent. In Switzerland, as in many other countries, different types of permits—and this is one of the points where the state is directly involved in processes of exclusion or inclusion—implicate a specific set of social, economic or political rights, or conversely exclusion from such rights. For this reason such homogeneity has direct consequences: the social capital of Albanian asylum-seekers is very low, because they rely mainly on other asylum-seekers or temporarily admitted persons, people at the lowest end of the scale of rights and living in a state of uncertainty. The in-depth interviews reveal that Albanians who arrived earlier in Switzerland as so-called 'guestworkers' make a clear distinction between themselves

and the 'others' in the community, in this case the asylum-seekers. These 'others' are seen as being responsible for the bad reputation that Albanians have in Switzerland, whereas 'they'—the guestworkers—have worked hard in Switzerland. In the same vein, guestworkers perceive 'the others'—the refugees—as getting everything from the nation-state, and contributing nothing to the well-being of Swiss society. Here, the dividing line is not language or citizenship, but the category of one's residence permit, the type of migration and the discourse surrounding them. As one person who has lived in Switzerland for 10 years with a residence permit said in the interview: 'Albanian asylum-seekers are mostly bad people and Switzerland has contributed to this problem by giving them so much money'. Such categories of internal division surely underlay historical changes and they might be interlinked with external processes of stigmatisation as well. The ideological tension between the guestworkers and asylum-seekers was surely not constant throughout the different periods, but was the most severe at the turn of the current century.

Furthermore, gender is another dividing line: women are often supported by other women, while men gain support from other men. Traditionally, 'Albanian' society has been described as being strictly gender segregated (Backer 1983; Denich 1974). Such strict segregation was not found in the networks; women and men also mixed for social support. Only a tendency for homogeneity along gender lines was observed. Women rely more on women and, for instance, send remittances to their families—mothers, sisters—without the knowledge of their husbands. What I mean to say is that, when it comes to 'transnational solidarity practice', gender can be a relevant category for group formation.

Yet other cleavages can be discerned: Albanians from Macedonia sometimes clearly demarcate themselves from Kosovo-Albanians. The relevant criterion for this we-group formation is religion, or more concretely the level of faith, as both groups are theoretically Muslims. Some Macedonian-Albanians feel that Kosovo-Albanians are not real, practicing Muslims. This can, in certain contexts, be of greater importance than a common language. Interestingly, I heard this argument only from Macedonians, but never from Kosovo-Albanians. On other occasions, both groups clearly demarcated themselves from the Albanians who come from the Republic of Albania; they perceive them to be criminals and involved in drug and other mafia networks.² But even here, we have to be cautious: older Kosovo-Albanians, mainly those on the political left and who were forced to leave Kosovo due to their participation in the nationalist student resistance movements in Prishtina as early as the 1980s, sometimes include the Albanians from the Republic in their 'framing'. Here, communism, a political orientation, is the relevant criterion for we-group formation.

Another important cleavage in the Albanian community is the rift between the urban and the rural Albanians. Among urban Albanians, establishing a clear boundary between themselves—'the modern and emancipated Albanians'—and the rural or 'traditional' ones is quite common. Here 'the others'—the rural ones—are

viewed negatively and are stereotyped, for instance by emphasising their lack of education and of women's rights, etc.

Thus, it can be concluded that, among Albanian-speaking migrants, we can observe categories of classification that transgress ethnic criteria. Conflicts, or just the decision with whom to spend the day or leisure time, are at first sight ethnically framed. But this homogenous group experiences clear and strict internal divisions as soon as we consider political orientation, gender, type of migration or religion, all of which are possible classifications for potential we-group formations.

The observations presented above can be completed by a look at how ethnicity is reflected on after returning to Kosovo. What relation do Kosovo-Albanians have to their ethnicity after returning to Kosovo? First of all, it can be noted that the 'bounded solidarity', as observed during the war and as described above, was an extremely temporary phenomenon. The analysis of the social networks of returnees revealed that the criterion of 'being or speaking Albanian' was not enough to gain access to important resources. In the context of the postwar order, it was the criterion of having fought for 'national liberation' which lay beneath the new 'bounded solidarity' and which was the relevant criterion for social inclusion or exclusion. The idea of a 'we-group' was no longer valuable for all Albanians, but only for this specific group of 'national liberation fighters'. And it was these fighters, mainly male, who gained access to help, jobs and other resources. We might even speak of the disintegration of the metaphor of a jellyfish after return, for new mechanisms of social inclusion or exclusion have been triggered in this postwar order, while still remaining linked to ethnicity, nationality and citizenship. The link is, however, of a new order and shows the relativity of ethnicity in its full extent.

Ethnicity at Stake: New Armenian Migrants in Switzerland

The second case study is also based on multi-sited-ethnology ethnography (Marcus 1995). What I intend to show is how different political, economic and discursive contexts influence we-group formation of collective identities. This study is based upon the subjective experiences of Armenian emigrants in different migration contexts. To understand the social, symbolic and economic effects of migration experiences and identity construction, the research team of which I was a part conducted in-depth interviews with Armenians who emigrated after the independence of Armenia in 1991, and either lived in Russia, in the town of Krasnodar, or resided in Switzerland at the time of the interviews. We also interviewed emigrants who had returned to Armenia. The interviews were conducted between November 2003 and April 2004 in the respective countries of residence of the interviewees, according to predefined interview guidelines. We carried out a total of 43 in-depth interviews: 16 in Switzerland (7 men, 9 women), 10 in Russia (6 men, 4 women), and 17 in Armenia (9 men, 8 women).³

Migration is far from being a new phenomenon for the Armenians. The events that took place during the First World War not only led to the tragic death of

approximately 1.5 million Armenians, but also resulted in the formation of a globally dispersed Armenian diaspora; one of those which today has the 'classic' diaspora status. Ironically, the most recent migration movements of Armenians coincided with the creation of an independent Armenian state in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since the independence of Armenia, approximately a quarter of its population has left the country. The focus of this case study lies exclusively on what we call *new* Armenian migrants, who emigrated after 1991.

The interviews revealed very different migration experiences, depending on the host country—Russia or Switzerland—and on the respective personal biography. One striking result can be summarised as follows: whereas in Russia ethno-national categories are of high relevance for collective group identity, for the new Armenian immigrants interviewed in Switzerland ethnicity is only relevant for identity construction and for feelings of social exclusion or inclusion on a secondary level. Other social categories are applied and are relevant in this latter context: among these most importantly we find social status as defined by the type of residence permit, that is 'being an asylum-seeker', or by the socio-professional status, that is 'highly skilled'.

Russia is the most common destination for Armenians due to long-lasting and well-established connections. In situations of crisis, like during and after the devastating earthquake in 1988 and the economic breakdown, political turmoil and ethno-national conflicts of the 1990s, Russia was the most accessible destination country, mainly due to its geographical proximity. Furthermore, Armenia and Russia share 70 years of Soviet rule, under the same supra-state structure, and many cultural and personal ties exist between the two countries. In addition, language is no obstacle, since Russian is the second mother tongue for many Armenians. It should also be mentioned that new migrants were able to build on a tradition of seasonal migration to Russia, which started in the 1960s and increased during the last decade of the Soviet Union. The new Armenian migrants living in Russia could, as an ideal type, be qualified as working migrants: they can be found mainly in non-qualified jobs and are often working and living in Russia without residence permits.

Switzerland on the other hand, has only recently become a destination country for new Armenian immigrants. As Switzerland was situated on the other side of the old Iron Curtain, it was inaccessible for most Armenians from the former Soviet Union prior to Armenian independence. Since official Swiss statistics register people by nationality, it is difficult to know how many people defining themselves as Armenians actually live in Switzerland. Only a small proportion of those who define themselves as Armenians in Switzerland have an Armenian passport: after the break-up of the Soviet Union the Armenian population lost its former Soviet citizenship, without having a new legal system defining Armenian citizenship until the adoption of the Republic of Armenia's Constitution on 15 July 1995 (Bachmann *et al.* 2003). Census data enumerate only 675 Armenian citizens living in Switzerland in 2000, whereas there are 1,533 members of the Gregorian-Armenian Church (Swiss Federal Office for Statistics 2005). On the other hand, estimates by Armenian associations in Switzerland give about 6,000 Armenians, most of whom are now Swiss citizens.

The establishment of an Armenian community in Switzerland dates back more than 100 years. As early as 1870 the University of Geneva attracted intellectuals from the Russian Empire, including many Armenians (Ter Minassian 1999). The numerically most significant group of Armenians arrived in Switzerland from Turkey during the 1920s, seeking to escape the brutal events. A second group arrived in Switzerland during the 1960s and 1970s. This group was part of the flow of Turkish migrant workers seeking employment in Europe. A third and much smaller movement of Armenian migrants to Switzerland is composed primarily of citizens from the newly independent Republic of Armenia. Unlike the Armenians who reached Switzerland as Turkish ‘guestworkers’ in the 1960s and 1970s, the most recent or ‘new’ Armenian migrants were, and still are, confronted with the increasingly restrictive policies of European countries. Switzerland replaced its quite liberal admission policy in 1989, as mentioned before, and the new policy offers educational and work opportunities almost exclusively to highly qualified foreigners. Consequently, since 1989, Armenian immigrants have been either members of a professional elite, or a very dissimilar type of migrant, asylum-seekers, living under very different conditions in Switzerland. Since 1992, Switzerland has seen the arrival of slightly more than 2,300 Armenian asylum-seekers (UNHCR 2002). As a consequence it was possible to distinguish two groups in the interviews: a group of highly qualified professionals working or studying in Switzerland—IT specialists, musicians, artists, biologists—and a group who arrived as asylum-seekers. Although the Armenian migrants are not distinguishable in educational terms as such—for both groups mainly consist of highly educated individuals—only the first group is in a position to benefit from their acquired knowledge. Also, if asylum-seekers are among the highly skilled, they are least likely to find a qualified job or participate in a qualified education programme; the determining factor is not how highly educated they are, but rather with which type of permit they are admitted to Swiss territory, as this has important effects on the activities the holder is allowed to undertake in Switzerland.

It was necessary to describe these different migration contexts in order to show how the significance of ethnicity varies for the new Armenian migrants depending on the country they are living in.

As Armenia was once part of the former USSR, life in Krasnodar, where the interviews were conducted, and life in Armenia have certain qualities in common. Whereas the differences between Europe and Armenia were among the first aspects Armenians in Switzerland mentioned, Armenian migrants in Russia began by emphasising familiar qualities and similarities. When asked what the main differences were between Russia and Armenia, interviewees mostly refer to ‘traditions’ and ‘values’. ‘Only traditions distinguish Armenia from Russia. We all lived in the USSR and everything was the same except tradition’, was the answer of a 37-year-old migrant in Krasnodar, questioned about the differences between Armenia and Russia.

Armenian migrants point to their ‘traditionally’ strict moral values compared to the ones Russians have: reportedly Armenian girls and women do not smoke or drink

and people show respect for the elderly. In this discourse the boundary of ethnicity is highly dependent on gender and there is reliance on gender attributes when specifying ethnic identity. Describing her grandchild, an elderly Armenian woman in Krasnodar said:

Oh! She is such a beautiful girl. She speaks Armenian. This year she graduates from the university. [...] My grandchild looks like a real Armenian, her beauty is Armenian beauty, she doesn't smoke, doesn't drink.

Anthias and Yuval-Davis' (1992: 133) observation that much of ethnic culture is organised around rules relating to sexuality, marriage and the family, implying that a true member will conform to these rules, seems to apply here.

The interviews in Russia made it clear that both language (in the sense of discourse) and also practice as to what is perceived as typically 'Armenian' culture are of great importance in life, as well as identity formation, in the Armenian community. Interviewees felt that it is not only important to be 'Armenian', but simultaneously equally important to connote this positively. As one woman interviewed put it:

I do not want our traditions to die here [in Krasnodar]. I do not like the fact that the Russians do not respect elderly people. In our country, a mother is a holy person. Up to now, it has been like this in Armenia and I hope this will never change. From the beginning, children always respect their parents.

On the other hand, it must be emphasised that such representations of essentialised identities underlie a dialectic process. While Armenians in Russia favourably emphasise their ethnic origin for the purpose of constructing their identity, the local Russian population primarily identifies the immigrants according to their ethno-national background as 'Armenians'. The so-called ethno-territorial conflicts in the Caucasus and the wars related to them might favour this kind of representation. Not only does the local population in Russia essentialise Armenian identity, the migrants themselves have recourse to this kind of reification and representation. These processes lead to the emergence of the idea that there are two homogenous and clearly demarcated ethnic or national groups. An Armenian migrant who had lived in Krasnodar for 10 years expressed it in the following manner:

Here, people think very differently. They think for instance that Armenians are not honest. Here, when you need some help, nobody will open his door to help you.

Or, as another person put it:

Different nations mean different ways of thinking. The difference in points of view causes clashes among these nations.

Historically, this specific discourse regarding 'Armenian-ness' might be in line with the use of language along ethnic lines, resulting in the creation of a regime that

distinguished between citizenship, on the one hand, and nationality on the other. Whereas Soviet citizenship was considered universal in nature, nationality dealt with 'ethnos' and corresponded to ethnic (or national) minorities—to an 'ethnic nation'. According to Giordano (1997), dual affiliation was intended to guarantee the recognition of culturally defined rights for minority ethnic communities. In reality, however, it can be used in or have the effect of reinforcing prejudice, rivalry and hatred between different groups, inasmuch as it becomes one of the sources of injustice and favouritism that penetrates everyday life. This is one of the ways in which ethnicity, nationality and citizenship can be linked together. However, in the Russian context, ethnicity and nationality have a very specific meaning for the interviewees, and contribute or reinforce the ethnic framing of group formation. Ethnicity is—for the new Armenian migrants in Russia whom we interviewed—therefore of high relevance. In the Russian context, this gives a clear picture of the predominant and common-sense concept of 'ethnos' as something given, linked to blood relationships, and transmitted by family and generations. Social exclusion is experienced through nationality, or 'being' Armenian, which in the second step leads to other forms of exclusion, like living without a residence permit or not having access to qualified work.

In Switzerland the situation is quite different: it may be surprising that, for the new Armenian migrants, ethnic origin does not play such an important role. Also the type of discourse on 'Armenian traditional values' which was described in Russia is much weaker in the Swiss context. It should be stressed that this is not because Western liberal societies like Switzerland are 'ethno-culturally neutral', or present themselves as some kind of liberal 'civic nation' compared to the Balkans or the Eastern European countries (Kymlicka 2000). The difference lies more in how nationality, ethnicity and citizenship are linked and who is defined as being a 'foreigner'. It seems that for the new Armenian migrants the categorisations of asylum-seekers or highly qualified professionals come first in importance in the Swiss context, while ethnic or national background comes into play only secondarily. For the young, highly skilled, new Armenian migrants working or studying in Switzerland, 'being Armenian' was not of primary importance, as they defined themselves first as professionals. They speak several languages, and if the job requires it, they are willing to move to other countries. They work in 'multinational teams' and can be called highly skilled 'globetrotters'. Their aspirations for exile in Switzerland were professional in nature and based on a desire for professional qualifications and self-accomplishment.

On the other hand, the asylum-seekers we spoke with suffered from the uncertainty of their situation, which in some cases had lasted for years. And maybe even more importantly, they often expressed a feeling of shame and inferiority. Furthermore, they sometimes felt isolated, because they did not know anybody and gave the impression that they had very few opportunities to make friends. But it was not on the basis of their 'Armenian-ness' that they felt inferior and uneasy, although in fact their national background was indirectly a barrier to acquiring more rights in the Swiss context, as it was because of their nationality that they were able to enter

Switzerland only as asylum-seekers. These feelings of inferiority and shame were only expressed by the asylum-seekers and not by the highly skilled Armenians. To the question of whether it was difficult to adapt in Switzerland, one woman answered: 'Yes, sometimes I felt rejected. When people asked me what kind of permit I have, I could not say that I was asylum-seeker, we did not know if we would be allowed to stay in Switzerland.' A young Armenian asylum-seeker, who has lived in Switzerland for five years, answered the question of whether he has friends in Switzerland: 'Hm, not for the last few years. My permission N [asylum-seeker] is complicating relations with other people.'

Things are even more complicated when it comes to the relationship between the so-called Armenian diaspora and the new Armenian immigrants. I would like to stress that we have to avoid thinking of this diaspora as an 'entity', but instead as a category of practice, which articulates projects, mobilises energies and appeals to loyalties (Brubaker 2005). To 'practice' diaspora is a way of formulating the identities and loyalties of a population. As Tölölyan (1996: 17–19) has noted, old paradigmatic diasporas, as the Armenian diaspora illustrates, do considerable ideological work in order to be able to conceive of their communities as ideally continuous with the populations of diasporas in other nation-states and with the homeland. They lobby host-country governments on behalf of the homeland or devote funds and human resources to assist or influence the economy, culture and politics of homeland. Those who formulate policies may themselves be part of the population in question, or they may be speaking in the name of the homeland. Indeed, those who consistently adopt a diasporic stance are often only a small minority of the population that political or cultural entrepreneurs describe as being the diaspora.

The questions that arise from the analysis of the interviews are as follows: Which of the Armenians living in Switzerland represent 'Armenian-ness', and which categories are applied in the construction process of such 'Armenian-ness'?⁴

First of all, as Björklund (2003: 340) has written, Armenians in the diaspora (like many other diasporic people too) are tempted to think of their dispersion as acceptable in the short run but untenable in the long run. Only an Armenia will be able to guarantee the survival of the nation. Mixed feelings are caused by 'emigrated Armenians', as they were not expected to be emigrants. Somebody has to return in order to assure the survival of the nation. An Armenian musician in Switzerland put it as follows:

We are here, we are students, we work. But for them [the diaspora] it is a bad thing because we left our country. And we cannot explain to them, we are musicians, we have to learn something and this knowledge cannot be found in Armenia. They cannot understand this.

Secondly, from the interviews it can be stated that the established diaspora does not appear to have much in common with the new one, neither historically, nor in their way of life abroad. Only a few close contacts exist between the diaspora and new immigrants. What Ishkanian (2002: 386) points out for major cities with large

Armenian communities, such as Los Angeles or San Francisco, also applies to Switzerland and to a lesser extent to Russia (Krasnodar). Although new Armenian migrants live in places hosting established diaspora communities, and at times benefit from established diaspora institutions and organisations, they generally remain on the margins of these communities, they are outsiders. Rarely do they participate in communal life. The ones who are new to the host country are sometimes disappointed to find that alienation among members of the diaspora from today's Armenia is even higher than it is for the new immigrant communities. When asked about the differences, some points were mentioned by interviewees living in Switzerland. One obvious differentiating factor is the two groups' dissimilar historical backgrounds. As the Republic of Armenia was part of the USSR prior to becoming independent, those who lived in Armenia experienced more than 70 years of communist rule, whereas Armenians living in the diaspora were not exposed to the Soviet influence. Armenians subjectively perceive this factor to be one of the causes for the difference in 'culture' or 'mentality'. An Armenian immigrant woman put it like this:

My best friend in Switzerland is a diaspora Armenian. She is a student. The diaspora knows Armenia only from hearing about it. Armenia has something very idyllic, a mythology, they try to see only the positive things and they are very patriotic. But we, we know the reality. I can be tolerant towards Armenians who do not speak the Armenian language, but they [the diaspora] think that in order to maintain Armenian-ness, every Armenian has to speak Armenian. With regard to Turkey and the genocide, they are much more critical than we are. Or if we take the example of the music, I mean, we also listen to the national songs about our heroes and wars, but Armenians from Armenia also listen to modern music, jazz, or pop music.

On the whole, the concepts of 'ethnos' and 'nation' play a major role in the differentiation and fragmentation processes among 'Armenians'. The interview partners sometimes feel that, in the eyes of the Armenians of the old diaspora, they, the new migrants, do not suit their categories, and vice versa. Furthermore, in the Swiss context, processes of social exclusion are linked not only to nationality and ethnicity, but also to other categories. The first step in a partial exclusion process is that Armenians can only enter Swiss territory as highly skilled workers or as asylum-seekers. Once they are in Switzerland, processes of social exclusion and inclusion are highly interwoven with the type of residence permit and socio-professional categories. The new Armenian migrants differ from the diaspora with regard to the extent of the connections with the homeland, and the representation of this homeland is also different. One of these differences is that, for the new Armenian migrants, this connection has more of an individual character, whereas within the diaspora it is the community as a whole. This individualism is strongly emphasised by the new Armenian migrants who are in Switzerland for professional self-fulfilment, and not because of the 'community'.

Conclusion

What can be concluded from these two case studies about ethnicity, and its linkages to social inclusion and exclusion? First, I am aware that the two empirical case studies are very different, not only with regard to the methodological orientation, but also with regard to the migration history of the two groups. This might render comparison difficult. However, on another level, the two cases have some key characteristics in common. Both regions of origin experienced ethnically or nationally inspired armed conflicts and violence in the 1980s and 1990s and periods of nationalised democratic movements. What therefore unifies the two case studies is a clear linkage between representations of ethnicity and nation-state building, even if the manifestations and outcomes are different. Furthermore, for both cases we can observe phased immigration to Switzerland, resulting in two quite clearly separated groups: on the one hand, the Albanian-speaking guestworkers of the 1970s and 1980s and their families who arrived in the 1990s. On the Armenian side we have the members of the Armenian diaspora from the 1920s; and then a group of people, Albanians and Armenians, who arrived more recently, mainly by seeking asylum. Whereas most of the asylum-seekers from Kosovo did return—the situation of the remaining Kosovo-Albanian asylum-seekers has been largely settled since—the situation of the Armenian asylum-seekers is highly insecure. Among them, we can also distinguish a group of highly skilled, professional Armenians, working in white-collar jobs or as artists. One of the most pronounced dichotomies within the ‘Albanian community’ seems to be the one between the guestworkers and the asylum-seekers. Interestingly, we find the same distinction between outsiders and insiders among the Armenian migrants in Switzerland. In this group, it is the established Armenian diaspora which is fighting the Armenian asylum-seekers to represent the ideal ‘Armenian-ness’ and establish an order of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Armenians. This internal definition of established and outsiders built among ethnic groups might be interwoven with external stigmatisation processes by the dominant group (Swiss majority) in the construction of differences. It is relevant to observe that, in the Swiss context, there was a change in the mid-1980s in the target for xenophobic forces: from foreigners in general to asylum-seekers. Asylum-seekers have been more and more stigmatised in public discourses (Niederberger 2004). It seems as if these groups have internalised this public discourse.

In other words, we are concerned with a type of ethnicity where ethnic boundaries are encompassing; at the same time, however, the ethnic groups in question are internally fragmented and have established an order of insiders and outsiders. This may also be true for other groups which, like the Albanian-speaking migrants, at first glance seem to form a relatively homogenous ethnic group. In spite of the fact that Albanian-speaking migrants almost exclusively turn to other Albanian speakers when looking for social support, there are clearly defined outsiders and insiders and a distinct internal hierarchy within this ethnic group. ‘We-group’ formations are perhaps always, besides their ethnic framework, at the same time framed by other

categories of collective identity, such as political orientation, gender or religion, depending on the context and reflecting different dimensions of belonging.

What more can be said about the construction of ethnic boundaries and the 'practice' of ethnicity, based on these two case studies? I discussed the idea of 'homogeneity' within ethnic groups and emphasised the flexibility of ethnic boundaries. For the Albanian case, I illustrated this by the metaphor of a jellyfish: its constant changing of form refers to the relational character of ethnicity. But not only is the relativity of ethnicity highlighted by these case studies, they also give insight into the problem of the degree of ethnic framing and reification: in different contexts, emigrants of the same origin apply varying degrees of 'essentialising their origin', which is obviously directly linked to the relative and situational character of ethnicity. Whereas newly arrived Armenian migrants in Switzerland applied 'soft' ethnic essentialisations and regard other categories, such as social status, as important as well, the Armenian migrants in Russia applied 'harder' ones, reifying their collective ethnic identities much more rigidly. 'Soft' essentialisations are part of everyday reality, helping to structure and understand life by rendering it meaningful. The 'harder' the essentialisations are, the more often a 'more-or-less' will be replaced by an 'either-or' (Wicker 1997: 25). Finally, the case studies highlighted the state's crucial role in producing differentiated forms of exclusion or inclusion. In both cases, asylum-seekers were confronted with social exclusion, mainly as a result of their type of permit and only secondarily as a result of their national origin. Therefore we have to consider very carefully the articulations of different categories of forming collective identities and how these processes are taking place within a state.

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Notes

- [1] The situation is even more complicated, as Swiss citizenship is based on three levels: national, cantonal and communal (Steiner and Wicker 2004).
- [2] Interestingly enough, Albanians from the Republic of Albania apply the same stereotypes (drug dealers, mafia, etc.) when describing Kosovo-Albanians.
- [3] The study was conducted by a group of social scientists from the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies (SFM) and from Cimera, a private, non-profit organisation, which conducts, among other activities, international academic research projects in the Caucasus. From the SFM, those participating in this research project (apart from me) were Anna Neubauer and Martina Kamm, from the side of Cimera, Carine Bachmann and Aurélie Perrin. For full details and results see Bachmann *et al.* (2004).

- [4] I would like to point to the problem that we did interviews only with new Armenian migrants and not with diaspora Armenians. We can therefore only reflect indirectly their point of view.

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