Chapter 9
Minorities—An Expression of Diversity and an Exercise in Tolerance

Walter Leimgruber

9.1 Introduction

Majority—minority issues are characteristic of every society. Everywhere, there are numerically superior and inferior groups of all kinds. But numbers suggest that majorities and minorities are purely quantitative categories. Billionaires are a minority, poor people a majority; however, the former are outside minority research, contrary to the latter. The qualitative difference lies in the fact that billionaires have access to power, whereas the voices of the poor are rarely heard.

Discussions about minorities usually focus on ethnic and cultural characteristics (language, religion); sometimes they include economic and social features (income, employment, education, health). We have learnt to live with social and economic minorities, but cultural and ethnic minorities are often threatened by the majorities because they do not fit into a homogenous society. Tolerance, respect for the Others, is required. The problems of economic and social minorities can be solved through appropriate political, economic and societal measures intent to reduce the gap between majorities and minorities.

People stamped as minorities carry with them a negative image and are perceived as disturbing the mainstream way of life (such as the Roma and other non-sedentary groups; Leimgruber 2010). Coping with them is therefore a challenge to both politics and society: it means, for example, to communicate in several languages, tolerate different religious manifestations, and accept multiple cultural traditions. Majority groups often look down on minorities and marginalize them. Integrating them is a difficult process, and the price may be high. The integration of ethnic minorities in the Greater Mekong Subregion, for example, into the modern

W. Leimgruber (✉)
Department of Geosciences, Geography, University of Fribourg, 4,
chemin du Musée, CH-1700 Fribourg, Switzerland
e-mail: walter.leimgruber@unifr.ch

© Springer International Publishing AG 2018

S. Pelc and M. Koderman (eds.), *Nature, Tourism and Ethnicity as Drivers of (De)Marginalization*, Perspectives on Geographical Marginality 3,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-59002-8_9

world poses "serious problems of poverty, culture loss, and marginalization of ethnic groups" (McCaskill et al. 2008b, p. 1).

The minority problem is ultimately qualitative, despite the quantitative nature of the term. A minority group is numerically inferior to the majority, but this is only a superficial characterization. Rather, "subordinancy is the chief defining characteristic of a minority group" (Encyclopaedica Britannica 2014, minority) and has to do with power relations. Power is part of every relationship (Raffestin 1980, p. 45) at all scales, and "[t]hose with power make the rules" (Rattanavong 2008, p. 269). Power covers all human relations: financial power (consumption), social power (social hierarchy), cultural power (the dictatorship of the mainstream). Access to power is therefore much more important than numerical superiority as the case of South African Apartheid demonstrates. The true minorities are those with no access to power, and they are marginalized.[1]

9.2 Minorities and Diversity

This chapter was inspired by Switzerland and the Greater Mekong Subregion. In both regions there are various kinds of minorities, an expression of cultural diversity. However, people have accepted this situation in different ways.

Minorities are discussed with reference to a spatial unit, usually the nation-state. They are therefore also a question of scale: a group can be a minority in one spatial context but part of a majority in another. As a German speaking Swiss I am part of the German speaking majority in my country, but the five million German speaking Swiss are a small minority among the about 90 million German speakers in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Northern Italy etc. The same holds good for the Swiss French- and Italian speakers. The few Romansh-speakers are the only true national linguistic minority. Other linguistic minorities (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Tamil etc.), resulting from immigration, account for almost as many people as the French-speakers (Table 9.1).

Drawing the boundaries of a nation-state often created minorities because the boundary-makers ignored the societal facts on the ground. Borders thus cut across linguistic, ethnic, cultural and other groups. In this way different kinds of minorities emerge, each posing a particular challenge to the respective societies and their cultural policies (Bennett 2001). We can identify four distinct cases, each with its specific kind of social and cultural diversity (Leimgruber 2004a, p. 21):

1. A majority group rules a country but extends into a neighbouring state where it is a minority (Slovenes in Italy and Austria, Hungarians in Serbia, Slovakia, Romania, etc.)

[1] To some extent this applies also to women who are all too often marginalized when it comes to major decisions in all strands of life (see Lucas 2015 and other contributions in that volume).

Table 9.1 Languages (principal or 'mother' tongue) in Switzerland, 2014

Language	% of residents
German	63.3
French	22.7
Italian	8.1
Romansh	0.5
Other languages	20.9

Source Swiss Statistical Office (the total is 115.5% because many people indicated two or more languages as main/mother language)

2. A small minority group is divided into two or three groups by one or more state boundaries (Kurds, Catalans, Basques etc.).
3. A small minority living inside a state territory is unique and has no other ethnic, linguistic or cultural relatives (e.g. the Romansh in Switzerland, the Sorbs in Germany, etc.).
4. Diaspora designates a group that has been fragmented and lives scattered around the World. The Jews have been frequently quoted, but many Diasporas have emerged over time as a consequence of international migration.

Minorities (and thus diversity) are the result of historical processes. The present-day situation need not be final and is likely to change. Also, migrations as well as cultural policies are often the root of minority problems (Bennett 2001, p. 28).

"Diversity is the characteristic of nature and the basis of ecological stability" (Shiva 1993, p. 65). A high biological diversity is a sign for a sound ecosystem, both globally and regionally. This includes a high variety of plants and animals coexisting in a dynamic equilibrium. In agriculture, crop diversity is an important strategy to maintain soil fertility, defend the crops against pests, and ensure a varied food supply (Rattanavong 2008, p. 271). This is the basis of organic farming, where "biodiversity is both instrument and aim. Natural ecological balance, below and above ground, is a key to its success" (Scialabba 2003). Most people would agree on this basic principle, even if most current conventional agricultural practices oppose diversity.

What is important for the natural world also applies to human social systems. We are all different from each other, and although this difference may pose practical problems, it is vital in the long-term. While the importance of biodiversity has been gradually recognized, many people have not yet understood the richness of cultural diversity and its significance.

Diversity is the expression of the many ways nature and human societies organize, express and adapt themselves to equally varying conditions of life. "Diverse ecosystems give rise to diverse life forms, and to diverse cultures.… Cultural diversity and biological diversity go hand in hand" (Shiva 1993, p. 65). Proof is the fact that societies across the globe have developed different strategies to cope with similar conditions of life. Southeast Asia is a good example for diversity (Kumar and Siddique 2008).

The diversity in human systems differs from ecosystem diversity because value judgements play a central role in our thinking. Diversity will be seen as good and beneficial by those who are open-minded, but as bad and detrimental by people with a narrow outlook. Attitudes towards diversity in all fields (including nature) are therefore related to people's worldviews. Agricultural monocultures are an expression of short-term profit-oriented quantitative and linear thinking, whereas organic farming represents the very opposite (long-term orientation, quality and organic or systemic thinking). Linear thinking and uniformity are detrimental to both ecosystem and society, uniformity is the enemy of progress and an obstacle to development. The great inventors and thinkers were always marginal people, because their ideas deviated from the mainstream, but they took mankind forward.

This takes us to a fundamental principle to be applied with minorities: renouncing value-judgements along to the 'black-white' or 'good-bad' dividing line.[2] We are all human beings with strengths and weaknesses, and everyone possesses his and her particular gifts—on this level we are all equal. Differences occur on a lower level, and they are usually highlighted when it comes to deal with groups outside the mainstream. Politics often promotes a homogenous society, ostensibly in order to simplify life and administration, but homogeneity is an instrument of domination. Language is a manifestation of power (Raffestin 1980, p. 91) and occupies a particular place in politics (ibid. p. 97). Linguistic diversity, therefore, prevents the political power from totally and easily controlling its population. Minorities are obviously an obstacle to domination.

From an ecological perspective, homogeneity is negative. Monoculture farming leads to rapid environmental degradation: excessive synthetic fertilizer application results in soil depletion, and an increase in input will result in diminishing returns (Aubert 1996). It simplifies the technical side of agriculture, but ultimately annihilates its efforts. Heterogeneity is achieved through crop diversity (intercropping) and rotation, promoting diversity and maintaining soil fertility in the long run.

Our life is marked by short-term economic thinking, but little attention has been paid to the benefits diversity can offer the economy in the long run. In a seminal paper, the biologists Peter J. Edwards and Cyrus Abivardi emphasize the economic potential of biodiversity: "over-exploitation of resources, loss of genetic diversity and damage to ecological processes and life support systems have greatly reduced the planet's capacity to support people in both developed and developing countries" (Edwards and Abivardi 1998, p. 244). Maintaining biological diversity is in our interest, mainly because "we do not know how important species diversity is for the long-term stability of ecosystems; …" (ibid.).

The arguments are different in the human world, but the two diversities are related. Diversity in society is a stimulant to the development of social life. The variety of values, ideas and opinions drives human thinking, promotes innovations, teaches us to reflect, and helps to improve our quality of life. The former director of the United Nations Environmental Programme, Klaus Toepfer, summed up the

[2]Epitomized by the sheep on Animal Farm, bleating "Four legs good, two legs bad" (Orwell 1945).

analogy to biodiversity: "Respect for biological diversity implies respect for human diversity" (UNEP 1999, p. xi). In this volume on cultural and spiritual values of biodiversity, scientific analyses and source texts testify to the key role diversity plays in people's lives on all continents. Difference is regularly described as an asset, not as a drawback. Indigenous peoples, in particular, hold a lot of knowledge that would be useful for the future. "Indigenous peoples represent 95% of human cultural diversity, and, I daresay, 95% of humanity's breadth of knowledge for living sustainably on this Earth" (Joji Carino before the UN; General Assembly 1997, p. 32). In other words, there are economic benefits to be gained from cultural diversity. Biological and cultural diversity are comparable because of existing and potential benefits and because they help to integrate the human society into the ecosystem; they are in fact complementary (Table 9.2). Both include use values and non-use values, the former being of immediate or future economic importance, the latter acting on the human mind and soul. Both are equally important for the future of mankind.

Our western society has largely forgotten the contribution diversity in both domains has furnished to humanity in the past, is furnishing at present, and is able to furnish in the future. By emphasizing external (secular) values over spiritual ones, we have destroyed not only the environment but also human solidarity. Most traditional societies lived in harmony with nature, and there exists a "spiritual attachment to land and to the biodiversity that is found within that land or near the river" (Morea Veratua from Papua New Guinea, UNEP 1999, p. 154). "Traditional or indigenous knowledge systems of nature, environment, and the various ecosystems within it, represent the most valuable survival kit in rural areas" (ibid.). Spiritual (sacred) values are needed to preserve biodiversity, such as holy hills (the Dai in the Xishuangbanna region of Yunan; ibid., p. 381 f.) or sacred groves (Western Ghats; ibid., p. 382 ff.). This is also the message conveyed years ago by Schumacher (1999, in particular p. 24).

For centuries Europeans saw themselves as superior to nature and other cultures (Said 1978). They exported their values to other continents and influenced the transformation of traditional practices anchored in local knowledge about diversity. Modernization became the key term to improve the living conditions of supposedly primitive (non-European) societies. The consequences are dramatic, both for ecosystem and society, as an example by Jiang (2008) demonstrates. Her case study of a Khmu village that has moved from the traditional slash-and-burn agriculture to modern rubber plantations illustrates major recent transformations in the Mekong region. Rubber trees replaced the rainforest, which "preserves three times as much water as a rubber plantation" (Jiang 2008, p. 250). Also, "[r]ain washes away six times as much topsoil in rubber plantations than in tropical rainforests" (ibid., p. 248). As a result, the regional climate has become drier and hotter (ibid., p. 250). The Khmu used to live in close relationship with their environment. Their simple techniques (slash-and-burn agriculture, limited burning, using sowing sticks, and leaving tree stumps for new buds to grow) had a modest impact on the ecosystem. They lived on a variety of foodstuffs and survived if one crop would fail. Diversity ensured their survival. Large rubber plantations have replaced almost all

Table 9.2 Comparing biological and cultural diversity (Leimgruber 2014, p. 72, based on Edwards and Abivardi 1998 and Leimgruber 2004a)

	Use value			Non-use value	
	Direct use value	Ecological/cultural function value	Option value	Existence value	Bequest value
Biological diversity	Food (animal, vegetal) Raw materials (timber, fibres) Tourism	Flood control Photosynthesis Nutrient cycles Waste assimilation	Future medicines Genes for plant breeding New technology Resource substitute	Satisfaction that resources exist Psychological balance Re-creation	Altruism Between-generation equity Respect
Cultural diversity	Learning Alternatives Problem solving strategies	Exchange	Innovation Alternatives Experience	Satisfaction that variety exists Psychological balance Re-creation Intellectual challenge	Altruism Between-generation equity Experience

agricultural surfaces and created a high dependency on the world market for the sale of rubber and on external food sources. While their life was in a way secure because of nutritional diversity, they now depend on a monoculture and the whims of the world rubber market and its price fluctuations. Swidden farming has been condemned as detrimental to the environment, but a considerate practice with sufficiently long planting cycles allows the vegetation to recover (Miescher 1996, pp. 82–84).

Along with numerous authors (Anderson 1996; Attfield 1999; Carson 1962; Edwards and Abivardi 1998; Shiva 1993; Van Dieren 1995 and others), I insist that diversity is fundamental to the future of this planet. Species extinction robs us of a genetic resource pool, the extinction of languages reduces the range of ways of thinking. Thinking in diversity is more complex than linear thinking, but the only way of tackling a complex reality, because it stimulates mental flexibility. Shiva (1993) rightly criticizes western thinking as monocultures of the mind, as reductionist and unsustainable—similar to agricultural monocultures. Uniformity kills, both in agriculture and human society. “Yet what is ‘unproductive’ and ‘waste’ in the commercial context of the Green Revolution is now emerging as productive in the ecological context and as the only route to sustainable agriculture” (ibid. p. 58).

Diversity is an indicator of difference, and this is what geography is about, “the uneven distribution of phenomena over the earth surface” (Forsberg 1998, p. 19). All processes take place under different cultural, social, economic, and political circumstances; there is no uniformity. A ‘geography of difference’ (Miller 1998, p. 262) builds on the variety inherent in human thinking and acting. We must see difference as “a positive quality” (Leimgruber 2004c, p. 278). The political corollary is to recognize that unevenness (difference) must not lead to discrimination. The goal for development politics should be “to eliminate undesired (economic and social) disparities by maintaining the desirable (cultural) diversity” (ibid.).

9.3 The Negative Perception of Minorities

The minority ‘issue’ is only superficially a numerical question; it has much more to do with psychology, with perception, with “understanding ourselves” (Tuan 1974, p. 1). Many people have a problem with minorities, considering them a threat instead of an enrichment. Minorities may be a challenge to the social system, but they only become a threat if we consider them as such. Many groups suffer from such negative attitudes: foreigners, strangers, refugees, asylum-seekers, drug addicts, the poor, organic farmers,[3] members of religious sects, youngsters, the

[3]They are now recognized as a most valuable group in modern society since they work for, not against the ecosystem. The organic movement is almost 100 years old (Leimgruber et al. 1997), but its true merits have only been recognized since the 1980s.

elderly, the gay community, etc. Such negative perceptions of minority groups oscillate between indifference and violence.

Overemphasis of the 'We' against the 'Other' can result in skewed perceptions and lead to conflicts, as is the case in Myanmar. "The Burman-dominated authoritarian state saw diversity as a threat, and gave little priority to developing the ethnic borderlands; successive regimes also restricted ethnic political, cultural and social expression. These grievances run particularly deep in Rakhine State, where there is a strongly-held sense of separate identity, in part because it was historically never integrated into the Myanmar state." (International Crisis Group 2014, p. 7). Such a condescending attitude is the basis of discrimination, which fosters violence as the only answer.

Stereotypes usually arise out of individual cases but are not justified as generalizations. Judgements are often made following single incidents, and entire groups will eventually suffer. Knowledge and experience are the keys to avoid this:

> Of course, the fact that all actors move in situated contexts within larger totalities limits the knowledge they have of other contexts which they do not directly experience. All social actors know a great deal more than they ever directly live through, as a result of sedimentation of experience in language. But agents whose lives are spent in one type of milieu may be more or less ignorant of what goes on in others (Giddens 1984, p. 91; original emphasis).

To know a person or a country is likely to increase a constructive attitude and promote the understanding of people, countries or groups.

Prejudices result from a number of elements that influence the way minorities are perceived, treated and often discriminated: origin, religion, language, personal names.

The origin of immigrants is significant because they arrive from a different cultural background and socio-cultural system, which marks them as outsiders. This was the case with the Italian workers in Switzerland in the 1950s and 1960s, although they spoke one of our national languages. Their presence was felt as a burden on our society, and the political reaction became virulent. Years after, when other linguistic minorities arrived (from Spain, Portugal, Ex-Yugoslavia), the Italians vanished from the xenophobic discussion. We realize nowadays that they, as well as other immigrants, have considerably enriched our culture (e.g. in the field of food and eating habits).

Although religion has lost a lot of its significance in our society it is still an important cultural element. Switzerland is a Christian country with Protestants and Catholics as major groups, a difference still felt today (e.g. with public holidays). With the Tibetan refugees (1960s) we obtained a Buddhist minority, which integrated well with our society and managed to maintain its traditions. Initially, Muslims did not create problems, but the rise of Islamist terrorism has produced generalized fears of Islam and a widespread islamophobia.

Language is an important vehicle of communication and allows to identify a speaker's origin. In German-speaking Switzerland, local and regional dialects dominate conversations, and non-German speakers manifest considerable

difficulties when it comes to learn German. An additional problem for them is that we do not speak the written German except under specific circumstances. Communications between employer and worker, between doctor and patient etc. are better conducted in dialect. This problem is unknown in the French and Italian speaking parts of the country.

Personal names are related to language. A strange name or even suffix (such as the Slav endings of –ic) may suffice in Switzerland to stigmatize a person, particularly in the German-speaking part. And Switzerland is by no means unique. “A Thai surname carries with it preferential treatment regarding various opportunities in Thai society, such as getting into the army or police or being promoted to higher positions in government. Many ethnic minorities therefore change their names in order to avoid discrimination” (McCaskill et al. 2008a, p. 17; McCaskill 2008, p. 312). The personal name is part of one’s identity; by adopting a new surname, an individual may improve his/her chances in the mainstream society but risk discrimination and marginalization within his/her own group. But a change of name is not possible everywhere (in Switzerland, women can adopt their husband’s, and men their wife’s name).

Minorities are often seen as an obstacle or unwelcome element in a nation, they are “problematic” (Jackson-Preece 2004, p. 7) and viewed as not being helpful in state building. The origin of this idea lies probably with John Stuart Mill who argued that the existence of different languages within one state prevents the working of a representative government (ibid., p. 11). However, many states function well despite (or because) of minorities. Nationalism and chauvinism are often the source of tensions between dominant and minority groups, as in the Carpathian Basin (Romania) where Hungarian minorities were considered as “the main supporters of Hungarian irredentism and revanchism” (Kocsis and Kocsis-Hodosi 1998, p. 13).

9.4 Minorities as an Asset

The negative attitude towards minorities overlooks the role they play for social diversity. As pointed out above, minorities are beneficial because they remind us of the differences that exist within our societies and the diverse nature of mankind. However, the current globality paradigm is opposed to diversity and discards minorities as quantité négligeable. Our western civilization is characterized by a ‘chess-board mentality’ where everything has its orderly place in a ‘mental square’, there is no space for flexibility. This will eventually result in social and spatial marginalization.

Why are minorities an asset? The answer can be found in Table 9.2. The diversity due to minorities not only offers direct use values but also long-term option values. Every group has its own ways of thinking and acting, of responding to social and natural challenges, of securing its livelihood.

Minority studies focus on ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, leaving aside other possible categories. But even so this emphasis shows various difficulties in daily coexistence that can be traced back to our perception of people and should be corrected and overcome.

Among ethnic minorities, particularly indigenous peoples are still considered to be backward and not modern (McElwee 2008, p. 63). However, modern is a very relative term and refers mainly to technological achievements. From an ecosystems perspective, backwardness is a positive value. Ethnic minorities are often traditional societies that cherish sacred values, biodiversity, and the ecosystem (UNEP 1999). They take care of the environment in ways the western world has largely forgotten. By declaring mountains, forests, and watercourses as sacred and inhabited by nymphs, dwarfs, and other invisible creatures, they protected them from destruction. The taboo (Anderson 1996, p. 11) used to be a powerful instrument to this effect. We tend to discard the spiritual side as superstition because it does not fit with our secular worldview, and by discarding this important aspect, we ruin the ecosystem (and at the same time, with similar arguments, also our societies).

Linguistic minorities stand for a diversity of ways of thinking and problem solving, the opposite of linguistic uniformity, which "suppresses ways of thinking and expression" (Leimgruber 2004b, p. 189). To promote uniformity in languages as a political programme is an assault on this diversity. To be able to express one's ideas in one's own language is a human right: nobody must be discriminated because of language: "The non-discrimination principle is a fundamental rule of international law" (Ayton-Shenker 1995). On the international stage politicians prefer to express their views and ideas in their own language (in the UN or during press conferences). Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 (entry into force in 1976) is explicit:

> In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

The European Court of Human Rights follows the UN practice (Council of Europe 2011, p. 13):

> 20. According to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the right of everyone to take part in cultural life, enshrined in Article 15 § 1 (a) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, includes the right to express oneself in the language of one's choice. This may be particularly important for persons belonging to minorities, who have the right to preserve, promote and develop their own culture, including their language.

This holds good even if the individual countries can develop their own regulations, in particular in "communications with public authorities" or "to receive information in a language of one's choice" (ibid.).

Switzerland has solved this problem by declaring German, French and Italian as national and official languages, and Romansh as a national language. All federal legal texts must be in the three official languages and are equally binding. The

Confederation uses Romansh as an official language when communicating with Romansh-speakers, but in the Grisons it is an official language. The cantons are regional sovereign states and have their own language policy, which is important in the case of bi- and trilingual cantons (Berne, Fribourg, and Valais as bilingual, Grisons as trilingual). The term 'diversity' figures in the Preamble to the Swiss Constitution, and 'harmony' is a goal in the relations between the various linguistic groups. There is an overall appreciation of this diversity, and the minorities are cherished, even if in everyday reality, communication can be difficult.

Diversity extends into the dialects, particularly among the German-speaking Swiss. Their dialects are a particular challenge. While standard German is used in writing and education, dialects are central to everyday informal oral communication. There are, for example, more than 35 regional and local expressions for 'dandelion' and about as many for 'kiss'. In the French-speaking part, dialects have disappeared, and the Italian dialects are used in families and with friends only. Romansh consists of five different dialects.

Religious minorities can refer to the same article of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 as linguistic ones. However, religion is a delicate field. Religions are worldviews, mental philosophical constructs, and ideologies. Their foundation is the belief in a superior and invisible force called God, which/who is beyond criticism. Religion as a belief system penetrates people's life much more than languages. Learning a new language is a personal enrichment, and we do not abandon the old one. Religious conversion, however, has far reaching consequences on one's perceptions and actions. It occurs when the new religion is seen or propagated as superior to the old one.

But religious conversions are also a way to break out of traditional bonds. In the Mekong region, for example, the two most popular alternatives to traditional religions are Christianity and Buddhism, "chosen because they release hill peoples from their all encompassing bonds with their traditional communities and provide more options for individuals in coping with today's globalized world" (Buadaeng and Boonyasaranai 2008, p. 84). This breach with tradition is a sign of cultural transformation, but it is "a challenge for hill peoples to maintain their plural local, ethnic, national, and global identities within the framework of the world religions" (ibid., p. 81). Their identity may even be reinforced as the Christian churches "usually adopt some Karen and Akha cultural elements" (ibid., p. 81), including language and writing system, traditional dress, food. This recalls the situation in Africa and Latin America, where indigenous cultural elements have been incorporated into Christianity. This is also a sign that religions can be dynamic and adapt themselves to regional particularities without altering the fundamental belief.

9.5 Conclusion

Despite its wide range the term 'minorities' is conventionally used for a restricted number of cases. The two books on the Mekong region (Leepreecha et al. 2008; McCaskill et al. 2008a), for example, that motivated me to engage in this reflection, discuss it from the ethnic perspective with reference to indigenous peoples. The political discourse is even more restricted and eclipses a systemic view because it would mean to accept the role they play in a society.

The same restricted view holds good for international conventions and treaties. Such agreements are a step forward towards recognition of their significance, but the way to implementation is long. The protection of minorities does not mean to put them under a glass cover. They must be accepted as they are and be able to choose freely to what extent they want to accept and adopt mainstream values and how much of their own particularities they will retain. A well-established and stable political system will gain a lot if it provides a minority with a higher status than its share of the population would mathematically justify. To overemphasize a minority signifies that it is appreciated, that it is part of the national diversity, and that it is not a threat to the majority. Sharing the political power helps to integrate minorities and provides them with a sense of citizenship, which will be beneficial for the entire society. Tolerance in this domain is a sign of generosity, too often absent from power politics. The way we treat a minority defines the way it will treat us.

References

Anderson, E. N. (1996). *Ecologies of the heart: Emotion, belief, and the environment*. Oxford University Press.

Attfield, R. (1999). *The ethics of the global environment*. Edinburgh Studies in World Ethics, Edinburgh University Press.

Aubert, C. (1996). Chinese agriculture, the limits of growth. In *Itinéraires, Notes et Travaux*, (46), 3–34. Geneva: Institut Universitaire d'Études du Développement (IUED).

Ayton-Shenker, D. (1995). The challenge of human rights and cultural diversity, United Nations Background Note, United Nations. Department of Public Information DPI/1627/HR–March 1995. http://www.un.org/rights/dpi1627e.htm. Retrieved 09.05.2014.

Bennett, T. (2001). *Differing diversities: Cultural policy and cultural diversity*. Council of Europe: Strasbourg.

Buadaeng, K., & Boonyasaranai, P. (2008). Religious conversion and ethnic identity: The Karen and Akha in northern Thailand. In McCaskill et al. (Eds.), (pp. 59–88).

Carson, R. (1962). *Silent spring* (Reprint 2000). London: Penguin.

Council of Europe. (2011). Cultural rights in the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights, Research Division, Council of Europe, European Court of Human Rights. http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Research_report_cultural_rights_ENG.pdf. Retrieved 09.05.2014.

Edwards, P. J., & Abivardi, C. (1998). The value of biodiversity: Where ecology and economy blend. *Biological Conservation, 83*(3), 239–246.

Encyclopædia Britannica. (2014). Minority. *Encyclopædia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica.

Forsberg, G. (1998). The differentiation of the countrysides. In L. Andersson & T. Blom (Eds.), *Sustainability and development: On the future of small society in a dynamic economy* (pp. 19–29). Regional Science Research Unit, University of Karlstad.

General Assembly. (1997). Nineteenth Special Session, 23–27 June, 1997, 3rd Plenary Meeting, 24 June 10 a.m., Official Records, New York. http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N97/857/29/PDF/N9785729.pdf?OpenElement. Retrieved April 08, 2015.

Giddens, A. (1984/2001). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Oxford (UK): Polity Press.

International Crisis Group. (2014). *Myanmar: The politics of Raknine State*. Asia Report 261, Brussels.

Jackson-Preece, J. (2004). Deconstructing the problem of minorities. In ZEU Giessen (Ed.), *Schriften zur internationalen Entwicklungs- und Umweltforschung* (Vol. 6, pp. 7–20). Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Jiang, L. (2008). *K*hmu identity and survival in globalizing China: A double dilemma. In D. McCaskill, P. Leepreecha, & H. Shaoying (Eds.), (pp. 229–258).

Kocsis, K., & Kocsis-Hodosi, E. (1998). *Ethnic geography of the Hungarian minorities in the Carpathian Basin*. Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Geographical Research Institute RCES & Minority Studies Programme.

Kumar, S., & Siddique, S. (2008). *Southeast Asia: The diversity dilemma. How intra-regional contradictions and external forces are shaping Southeast Asia today*. Singapore, Select Publishing.

Leepreecha, P., McCaskill, D., & Buadaeng, K. (Eds.). (2008). *Challenging the limits: Indigeous peoples of the Mekong region*. Chiang Mai: Mekong Press.

Leimgruber, W. (2004a). The right to diversity: Human rights from a geographical point of view. In ZEU Giessen (Ed.), *Schriften zur internationalen Entwicklungs- und Umweltforschung* (Vol. 6, pp. 21–36). Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Leimgruber, W. (2004b). Values, migration, and environment: An essay on driving forces behind human decisions and their consequences. In J. D. Unruh, M. S. Krol, & N. Kliot (Eds.), *Environmental change and its implications for population migration*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Leimgruber, W. (2004c). *Between global and local: Marginality and marginal regions in the context of globalization and deregulation*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Leimgruber, W. (2010), The Roma in Europe. The social and spatial marginalization of an itinerant group in a sedentary society, *Issues in geographical marginality*. In G. Jones (Ed.), *Papers presented during the Commission Meetings 2001–2004*, Walter Leimgruber, Etienne Nel, CD-Rom, Rhodes University, Grahamstown/South Africa.

Leimgruber, W., Dettli, W., & Meusy, G. (1997), Organic farming: A solution to marginality? *Proceedings of the Symposium 'Issues of environmental, economic and social stability in the development of marginal regions: Practices and evaluation'* (pp. 160–169), Glasgow.

Lucas, C. (2015). Is there a specific role for women in helping to achieve environmental sustainability through politics? In J. Hawley (Ed.), *Why women will save the planet* (pp. 38–48). London: Zed Books.

McCaskill, D. (2008). "Fix" and "flux": The transformation of Hmong culture and identity. In D. McCaskill, P. Leepreecha, & H. Shaoying (Eds.), (pp. 277–318).

McCaskill, D., Leepreecha, P., & Shaoying, H. (Eds.). (2008a). *Living in a globalized world. Ethnic minorities in the Greater Mekong Subregion*. Chiang Mai: Mekong Press.

McCaskill, D., Leepreecha, P., & Shaoying, H. (2008b). Globalization, nationalism, regionalism, and ethnic minorities in the Greater Mekong subregion: A comparative analysis. In D. McCaskill, P. Leepreecha, & H. Shaoying (Eds.) (pp. 1–57).

McElwee P. D. (2008). Ethnic minorities in Vietnam: Are globalization, regionalism, and nationalism hurting or helping them? In P. Leepreecha, D. McCaskill, & K. Buadaeng (Eds.) (pp. 55–76).

Miescher, D. (1996), *Die Tropen—ein ökologisch benachteiligter Raum?* PhD thesis, Faculty of Science, University of Fribourg/CH.

Miller V. P., Jr. (1998). Where shall we go from here? A position paper on future directions within PIMA. In D. Gourlay (Ed.), *Marginal rural areas in the new millennium. New issues? New opportunities?* The PIMA98 International Conference at the Scottish Agricultural College, Aberdeen, Scotland, June 26th–29th 1998 (pp. 257–274).

Orwell, G. (1945). *Animal farm*. London: Secker & Warburg.

Raffestin, C. (1980). *Pour une géographie du pouvoir*. Paris: Libreries Techniques (LITEC).

Rattanavong, H. (2008). The changing livelihoods of the Akha in Muang Sing and Muang Long in Laos. In McCaskill, D., Leepreecha, P., & Shaoying, H. (Eds.) (pp. 259–276).

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Schumacher, E. F. (1999). *Small is beautiful: Economics as if people mattered*, Point Roberts/Vancouver, Hartley & Marks (originally published 1973).

Scialabba, N. E. (2003). Organic agriculture: the challenge of sustaining food production while enhancing biodiversity, United Nations Thematic Group, Sub-meeting on wildlife, biodiversity and organic agriculture, Ankara, Turkey, 15–16 April 2003. http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/005/AD090E/AD090E00.HTM. Retrieved 05.04.2010.

Shiva, V. (1993). *Monocultures of the mind. Perspectives on biodiversity and biotechnology*. Zed Books, London and New York, and Third World Network, Penang.

Tuan, Y. -F. (1974). *Topophilia: A study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

UNEP. (1999). *Cultural and spiritual values of biodiversity*. United Nations Environmental Programme: Nairobi.

Van Dieren, W. (1995). *Taking nature into account. Towards a sustainable national income. A report to the Club of Rome*. New York: Copernicus-Springer.