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Autochthony, ethnicity, indigeneity and nationalism: Time-honouring and state-oriented modes of rooting individual–territory–group triads in a globalizing world

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Abstract

Recently, proliferating discourses on autochthony and indigeneity have been noted as the flip-side of globalization. Against this backdrop, this article synthesizes insights from studies of nationalism and research on autochthony, explaining how identity formations literally 'take place' by conceptualizing 'autochthony' – the proclaimed 'original' link between individual, territory and group – as the root phenomenon. Two causal logics underlying this autochthonous ethnicity are distinguished, which honour time differently: 'individualized autochthony' links the individual, territory and group in such a way that shared culture/descent follow from place of birth/residence within the same present, whereas 'collectivized autochthony' inverts this causality on the basis of continuously evoking the same past. The article concludes by distinguishing between 'indigeneity' and 'nationalism' as alternative modes for targeting the state: whereas indigeneity refers to cases of autochthony that demand special entitlements from the state, nationalism denotes such cases that aim for the very entitlement of the state itself.

Keywords

autochthony, citizenship, ethnicity, globalization, identity formation, indigeneity, nationalism, politics of belonging, statehood, transnationalism

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In recent years it has become increasingly evident that globalization and identity operate in some kind of dialectic between flow and closure (Meyer and Geschiere, 1999), with the contradictory expansions of modernity producing an accelerated desire for interconnecting individuals, groups and 'their' territories, and for firmly rooting such triads in global space. Arguably constituting the flip-side of globalization (Geschiere, 2009), this process has entailed the resurgence of local identities, vernacular forms of autochthonous exclusions as well as the proliferation of 'indigenous peoples' all over the globe. Celebrated by some as, at last, the necessary political recognition of cultural difference, others have been less optimistic about the effects of this expansive identity politics that has emerged as the uneasy companion of the seemingly dated ideal of equality within liberal and avowedly 'modern' states.

Within anthropology, these divisions have recently crystallized in a debate following Adam Kuper's provocative criticism of the notion of 'indigeneity' in his article 'The return of the native' (2003), which generated varied responses published in *Current Anthropology* 44(3), 45(2), *Anthropology Today* 20(2), 20(5) and *Social Anthropology* 14(1). Kuper strongly argues against 'indigenous people' as both an anthropological concept and a political tool for activists, claiming that this phrase, first, is based on obsolete anthropological notions of 'primitive society' and essentializations of culture; second, ultimately makes use of 'the Nuremberg principle' of descent despite all its rhetoric of 'culture'; and, third, in its application creates new divisions, while being less likely to promote the common good than are policies evoking individual rights of citizens within liberal-democratic states.

The discussion that ensued focused, among others, on the question whether 'indigeneity' should be principally rejected because of its cultural essentialism, deconstructed within contemporary anthropology, or whether its 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1988) should be politically endorsed in order to pragmatically improve the living conditions of marginalized groups. Alan Barnard's contribution to this debate is a case in point, arguing that when freeing the idea of 'indigenous people' from its 'old-fashioned associations with the "primitive" and the "perpetual"', it can be a useful legal tool for political persuasion, even though it is not a meaningful category for ethnographic description and analysis as 'there is no, and can be no, theoretically-unproblematic anthropological definition of "indigenous"' (Barnard, 2006: 10, 8).

Thus, while endorsing the political usage of 'indigeneity', Barnard does share Kuper's conviction about the principal grounds for the theoretical inappropriateness of the term. It is interesting to note that various contributors to the subsequent discussion of Barnard's article in the same issue of *Social Anthropology* 14(1) equally seem to regard 'indigeneity' as an inadequate theoretical concept. Most of these writers differ merely in either supporting (Guenther, 2006; Thuen, 2006) or rejecting (Kuper, 2006; Wolfe, 2006) Barnard's proposed double-bind of politico-legally propagating, while analytically deconstructing, 'indigenous peoples'. Yet two contributions by Justin Kenrick (2006) and by Evie Plaice (2006) do also point toward the possibility, if not necessity, of re-evaluating the apparent

theoretical poverty of the contested term within anthropology. As Plaire succinctly puts it:

I am not convinced that the separation Barnard suggests [between politico-legal usefulness and theoretical inappropriateness of the notion of ‘indigenous peoples’] is either practical or desirable. And if it is, I would argue the reverse: that the term and the discussion of it belong in anthropology, and not in law unless its meaning and application are supported by academic and intellectual discussion. (2006: 2)

In this article, I follow this path suggested by Plaire in providing a fresh look at the *theoretical* potential of the concept of ‘indigeneity’ as well as of several other identity-related notions within anthropology. I do so by generally exploring the theoretical interrelations between a bunch of terms that are often evoked together, yet rarely presented within a synthesized model, namely ‘autochthony’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘indigeneity’ and ‘nationalism’. I thereby proceed through bringing into dialogue two crucial bodies of literature – studies of nationalism, on the one hand, and of autochthony, on the other – which have engaged surprisingly little with each other conceptually and instead provided rather contradictory accounts as to how identity formations of individuals and groups literally ‘take place’: within studies of nationalism, it is typically the ‘non-ethnic’ (the ‘civic’) that is associated with territory through place of birth and/or residence (the ‘ethnic’ being mainly linked to descent and culture), whereas in research on autochthony, it is usually the ‘ethnic’ that legitimizes privileged access to territory through ‘first-comer claims’ rooted in the past.

Against this backdrop, I argue for a synthesis of insights from both fields by conceptualizing ‘autochthony’ – that is, the proclaimed ‘original’ link between individual, territory and group – as the root phenomenon. I propose distinguishing between two causal logics underlying the reproduction of this autochthony triad, which honour time in different ways: ‘individualized autochthony’ links the individual, territory and group in such a way that shared culture and/or descent ultimately follow from place of birth and/or residence within the same present, while ‘collectivized autochthony’ inverts this causality on the basis of continuously evoking the same past. Based on this notion of autochthony envisioned as the causal logic generally underlying ethnicity, I conclude by distinguishing between ‘indigeneity’ and ‘nationalism’ as alternative modes for accessing the state: indigeneity refers to cases of autochthony that, in compensation for past discriminations by dominant late-comers aligned with the state, demand special entitlements *from this state*, whereas nationalism denotes cases of autochthony that aim for the very entitlement *of the state itself*.

The civic–ethnic divide within studies of nationalism

Studies of nationalism have a long history of differentiating and analysing empirical cases of nationhood and national identity according to basic classifications.

While some authors have developed sophisticated typologies – for instance, Anthony D. Smith in his *Theories of Nationalism* (1983: 211–29) – most have been content with using one of various root dichotomies such as ‘political-cultural’, ‘liberal-illiberal’, ‘universalistic-particularistic’, ‘inclusive-exclusive’ and so on. A cursory list of such dichotomous distinctions provided by Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman (2005: 199) mentions 14 such dualisms, many of which overlap. Going back in time, the genealogy of these dichotomies notably includes an early distinction between ‘voluntarist’ and ‘organic’ nationalisms in the late 19th century (Smith, 2001: 36), Friedrich Meinecke’s (1919) opposition between the mainly passive *Kulturnation* and the rather politically active *Staatsnation* and – most prominently perhaps – Hans Kohn’s (1944) argument during the mid 20th century contrasting ‘western’ with ‘eastern’ forms of nationalism.

Kohn (1944), reacting against his experience of the German Third Reich, argued that nationalism was first developed in ‘the West’ by a strong bourgeois class in the context of the Enlightenment as the political and rational association of citizens pursuing their legitimate interests within a shared territory in the context of common laws. In ‘the East’, however, nationalism developed only later and largely in reaction to the success and confidence of its ‘western’ variant. According to Kohn, ‘eastern’ nationalism based itself on beliefs in common culture and descent, propagating a notion of the nation as an organic, supra-individual whole that permanently and inescapably recruited its members at birth. Emerging in a region ruled by imperial autocrats and semi-feudal landowners, and lacking a comparable bourgeois class, ‘eastern’ nationalism thereby exhibited an inferiority complex that proved to be dangerously susceptible to authoritarian and mystical forms of nationalism.

Kohn’s basic distinction between ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ nationalisms has turned out to be enormously influential within nationalism studies. Recently, this dichotomy has gained further prominence (not only within but also outside academia) through a terminological distinction between ‘*civic*’ and ‘*ethnic*’ nationalism. According to Smith, the ‘civic’ or western model is ‘predominantly a spatial or territorial conception’, while the distinguishing feature of the ‘ethnic’ or non-western nation is ‘its emphasis on a community of birth and native culture’ (Smith, 1991: 9, 11). Seen in this light, civic nationalism has typically been discussed positively as liberal, voluntarist and inclusive, while ethnic nationalism has been viewed negatively as illiberal, organic and exclusive.

Such broad and fundamental conceptions of nationalisms – ‘East’ and ‘West,’ ‘ethnic’ and ‘civic’ – have not passed, of course, without criticism. Kohn’s conceptual regionalism has been widely criticized for being crude, grossly exaggerated and having a somewhat neo-orientalist flavor (for example, Spencer and Wollman, 2005: 200). Thus, instead of denoting whole world regions, the civic–ethnic opposition has been increasingly used as a means of differentiating concrete states. However, as Rogers Brubaker (2004: 135) notes, many scholars of nationalism have lately ‘grown uncomfortable with the unequivocal sorting of cases into “civic” and “ethnic” categories’ and with characterizing ‘an entire state, or an

entire national movement, simply as civic or ethnic'. Instead, it has become, in a way, a mainstream position within studies of nationalism to regard 'civic' and 'ethnic' primarily as ideal-type positions and to analyse – as Smith (1991: 13) phrases it – all concrete cases as containing 'civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms. Sometimes civic and territorial elements predominate; at other times it is the ethnic and vernacular components that are emphasized.'

Despite these more nuanced usages of the civic–ethnic divide, several observers have highlighted the inherent analytical and normative ambiguities of this master dichotomy. For my current purposes, Brubaker's (2004) succinct discussion provides a satisfactory summary of the primary contentious issues. As Brubaker (2004: 136–40) shows, the civic–ethnic distinction is analytically ambiguous since both terms can be defined either broadly or narrowly, leading to fundamental problems in the concrete application of the dichotomy: If the term 'ethnic' is defined narrowly as only rooted in (assumed) descent, too many heterogeneous cases end up being classified as 'civic', while a broad notion of 'ethnic' as based on shared culture leaves hardly any cases in the 'civic' box. Conversely, a narrow concept of 'civic' as acultural, ahistorical and universalist 'has never been instantiated' (Brubaker, 2004: 137), whereas a broad definition also entailing a civic culture incorporates virtually all 'ethnic' cases as well. Thus, combining both narrow or both broad definitions creates a large middle ground covered either by neither or by both ideal-types. In addition, even if a definition of the 'civic' and 'ethnic' could be agreed upon, it is often very difficult to decide even for single elements within a given nation – as Brubaker convincingly shows with regard to language policies – in which box they actually belong.

Apart from these analytical uncertainties, Brubaker's (2004: 140–4) discussion also shows the civic–ethnic distinction to be haunted by normative ambiguities. As was mentioned before, 'civic' nationalism has typically been viewed as being positively inclusive, whereas 'ethnic' nationalism has been criticized for being dangerously exclusive. However, besides emphasizing that inclusion is nothing inherently positive, Brubaker (2004: 141) succinctly observes that 'in fact all understandings of nationhood and all forms of nationalism are simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. What varies is not the fact or even the degree of inclusiveness or exclusiveness, but the bases or criteria of inclusion and exclusion.' Based on this argument, Brubaker (2004: 144–6) finally argues for dissolving the ambiguous and overburdened civic–ethnic dichotomy and suggests, alternatively, a much more modest distinction between 'state-framed' and 'counter-state' conceptions of nationhood.

While I endorse Brubaker's criticism of the civic–ethnic divide and have advocated replacing this master dichotomy by several, more nuanced, analytical dimensions (Zenker, 2009), I still think that the analytical distinction between 'civic' and 'ethnic' nationalism has been valuable in enumerating most of the basic elements that seem typically to play some role in the (re)production of ethnicity. However, as I will argue below, these basic elements need to be conceptualized differently with regard to their various interrelations, and for this purpose a critical discussion

of a second body of literature, namely, the recent ethnography of autochthony, may be instructive.

The recent ethnography of autochthony

The *Oxford Dictionary of English* characterizes the term ‘autochthon’ as being derived from the Greek *autos* (self) and *khthon* (earth), literally meaning ‘sprung from the earth’ and designating ‘an original or indigenous inhabitant of a place’ (Soanes and Stevenson, 2003: 107). ‘Autochthony’ can thus be defined in a provisional manner as referring to a proclaimed ‘original’ link between an individual, territory and group, usually self-styling itself as profoundly ‘authentic’, ‘primordial’, ‘natural’ and ‘self-evident’.¹ In a literature review of the recent upsurge of autochthony-based discourses in various countries in Africa and Europe, Bambi Ceuppens and Peter Geschiere (2005) note that the intimately interrelated term ‘indigenous peoples’ has gained an even broader appeal, especially since the establishment of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982. However, Ceuppens and Geschiere emphasize that ‘indigenous peoples’ are usually conceived of as marginalized ‘others’ in need of protection in ‘their own lands’, whereas the ‘autochthon’ is typically conceived of as an ‘in-group’ in need of protection from scrounging strangers who have immigrated into and are threatening to take over ‘one’s own homeland’ (Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005: 386). While this bifurcation between autochthony and indigeneity might indeed occur in the popular imagination, I will argue below that, analytically speaking, indigeneity should be rather understood as constituting a particular version of autochthony.

From the early 1990s onwards, autochthony has emerged as an urgent and violently contested issue in many African countries – a development that can be interpreted as the rather unexpected corollary of democratization (especially through reintroduced multiparty elections) and increasingly decentralized development policies which sidestep the state (Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005: 385, 389–90; Geschiere, 2009: 17–21). As a central mode within the current politics of belonging, arguably the flip-side of globalization, discourses on autochthony take several forms that differ both within and between nation-states (Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005; Geschiere and Jackson, 2006).

In Cameroon, for example, the reintroduction of multiparty elections has led to an upsurge of autochthony amidst fears among locals of being ‘illegitimately’ out-voted in ‘their’ areas by more numerous ‘strangers’ who are, in fact, often co-citizens (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2000; Socpa, 2003). The ruling Biya regime has fuelled and successfully instrumentalized such fears by supporting regional elite associations and introducing new laws protecting ‘true’ locals against migrating co-citizens in order to split the political opposition (Geschiere, 2009: 39–65; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2000; Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003; Nyamnjoh and Rowlands, 1998). In the forest areas of southeast Cameroon, new decentralized development projects have recently bypassed the state, targeting local ‘communities’ and thus also turning the question as to who can claim ‘true’

autochthony there into a potentially lucrative issue (Geschiere, 2004, 2009: 66–96). Ironically, Baka hunter-gatherers, who also live in this forest region and are locally and internationally regarded as one of the world’s most ‘indigenous peoples’, seem to be largely excluded from such benefits since their relatively weak integration into the nation-state prevents them from turning, as Alec Leonhardt (2006) puts it, their merely ‘symbolic autochthony’ into profitable ‘substantive autochthony’. I will come back to this issue of success in claiming ‘indigeneity’ in the conclusion.

In Côte d’Ivoire, rather than providing an alternative identity to national citizenship, autochthony has recently been used to redefine the nation itself at a smaller scale. Against the backdrop of long-standing southward labour migration by both northern Ivorians and migrants from neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso, a southern bloc of various ethnic groups has established itself as the ‘true’ autochthonous nation under the notion of *ivoirité*, which has been reinforced not only in several legal provisions but also in violent clashes between diverse patriotic movements, ‘self-defence’ groups and militias (Chauveau, 2000; Dozon, 2000; Geschiere, 2009: 97–117; Marshall-Fratani, 2006). The strategic use of autochthony at different and varying scales is also highlighted in case studies of other parts of Africa. As Stephen Jackson (2006) shows for eastern Zaire/Congo, autochthony discourses have operated in that region on local, provincial, national and regional levels within a highly ambiguous segmentary identity structure, which – through its nervous and paranoid evocations – has led to much recent violence. In other African regions, conflicts about ‘true’ autochthony seem to have primarily taken place at the sub-national level. The west African savannah region of the Black Volta, for instance, has a long history leading back into pre-colonial times of contested land rights based on first-comer claims among various ethnic groups. These groups apparently agree that first-comer claims provide a legitimate framework in which to negotiate various forms of land rights. However, conflicts arise not only because of incompatibilities between diverse historical narratives but also due to differences in defining the ‘pivotal historical event’ – ‘coming first’ as either discovering or as clearing/working the new land – and in delineating the territorial and social reach of such first-comer groups (Lentz, 2006a, 2006b).

Europe has also recently witnessed a noticeable expansion of autochthony discourses. Against the background of accelerated immigration and globalization, the political right has increasingly evoked a rhetoric of autochthonous exclusion in countries such as Denmark, the UK, Austria, Italy, France, the Netherlands and Belgium (Ceuppens, 2006: 150; Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005: 397; Geschiere, 2009: 130–68; Geschiere and Jackson, 2006: 3; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2000: 440). In Belgian Flanders, the radical right-wing Flemish-nationalist party Vlaams Belang (VB) has been quite successful by ambiguously advocating the exclusion of allochthons at two different levels: on the one hand, VB has represented Francophone co-citizens from Wallonia and elsewhere in Belgium as ‘strangers’ and enemies within when propagating a rhetoric of Flemish separatism. On the other hand, VB has also denounced immigrants (most notably of Muslim descent) as scrounging allochthons within a pan-Belgian rhetoric of welfare

chauvinism, which reserves state welfare benefits to Flemish and Walloon autochthons alike (Ceuppens, 2006; Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005: 397–402).

As this fascinating new body of literature on Africa and Europe shows, autochthony is thus used as a means of specifying with regard to the state both which level within a segmentary identity structure is relevant in a given context and which identity definition at that given level is appropriate. In some contexts – like in Cameroon, along the Black Volta, within local, provincial and regional identifications rooted in eastern Congo as well as in the Flemish separatist discourse – autochthony thereby functions as an *alternative* to national citizenship. In other contexts – such as in Côte d’Ivoire, within national identifications in eastern Congo as well as in the pan-Belgian discourse targeting Muslim immigrants – autochthony operates rather as a *redefinition* of national citizenship (see Geschiere, 2009: 26).

This new ethnography is thus explicitly concerned with the relationship between autochthony and other forms of belonging such as ethnicity, nationality and citizenship. However, it is interesting to note that, within these texts, this relationship is typically engaged empirically rather than conceptually.² The authors generally use terms such as ‘ethnic groups’, ‘national citizenship’ or ‘the nation’ as conventional tags for specific levels within the segmentary identity structure without explicitly addressing the question as to what analytically distinguishes these various modes of belonging.³ In instances in which autochthony is actually defined in some way, this is typically done ambiguously through a characterization of autochthony, on the one hand, as ‘a new form of ethnicity’ equally capable of ‘creating an us–them opposition’ and ‘arousing strong emotions regarding the defense of home and of ancestral lands’ (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2000: 424; see also Ceuppens, 2006: 151; Geschiere and Jackson, 2006: 5–6). On the other hand, however, autochthony is also represented as different from ethnicity (Ceuppens, 2006: 149; Geschiere and Jackson, 2006: 5–6) as the latter notion ‘evokes the existence of a more or less clearly defined ethnic group with its own substance and a specific name and history’, whereas autochthony is ‘less specific’ (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2000: 424), ‘empty’ (Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005: 387; Geschiere, 2009: 28) and ‘contentless’ (Jackson, 2006: 100): ‘an identity with no particular name and no specified history, only expressing the claim to have come first, which is always open to contest’ (Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005: 387; see also Geschiere, 2009: 225 n. 2).

These definitions by Geschiere and other authors seemingly suggest that autochthony should ultimately be treated as distinct from ethnicity. But when having a second look at the discussed empirical cases from Africa and Europe, it becomes evident, first, that almost all described ‘autochthonous’ identities below the level of (nation-)states in fact do refer to named *ethnic* groups, which not only have specifiable histories but actually do specify them (among others) through claims of having been the first to arrive in ‘their own territory’. Second, even when the nation and its citizenry are redefined through autochthony at the state-level, this smaller-scale re-conception is usually ‘ethnic’ rather than ‘civic’ in nature. As a matter of fact, substituting ‘civic’ citizenship by a more restrictive ‘ethnic’ citizenship is typically

the very *raison d'être* behind the evocation of a rhetoric of autochthony in the first place. This suggests that, despite occasionally claiming the contrary, within this new ethnography of autochthony it is usually the 'ethnic' that legitimizes privileged access to land (and other territorialized resources) through autochthonous first-comer claims rooted in the past.

When comparing these observations from the new research on autochthony with the civic–ethnic distinction within studies of nationalism, it is evident that – somewhat ironically – both literatures provide rather contradictory accounts as to how identity formations of individuals and groups literally 'take place': in studies of nationalism, it is typically the 'non-ethnic', that is, the 'civic', that is associated with territory through place of birth and/or residence (the 'ethnic' being mainly linked to descent and/or culture). By contrast, within the recent ethnography of autochthony, it is generally the 'ethnic' that interlinks an individual, territory and group in such an allegedly 'original' way that land rights follow from first-comer claims linked to a 'pivotal event' in the past.

Towards a new synthesis: Autochthony as the causal logic behind ethnicity

Against the backdrop of this critical discussion, I suggest a synthesis of insights derived from both fields of research by conceptualizing *the causal logic* that principally underlies the (re)production of ethnicity in terms of 'autochthony'. Conceived of in this way, 'autochthony' can be described as a triad in which its three elements – 'individual', 'territory' and 'group' – are causally linked through the interconnections of place of birth/residence, group membership with land(ed) rights (that is, both rights in land and rights, the validity of which is territorially circumscribed) and shared culture/descent, while thereby being simultaneously situated in time. Within such an approach, the apparent inconsistencies between studies of nationalism and studies of autochthony can be reinterpreted as being *complementary* in addressing two alternative modes of this very same causal logic: these ideal-typical modes differ only with regard to their respective causal directions as well as the way in which they honour time.

'Civic' nationalism can hence be interpreted as being based on '*individualized autochthony*' in which an individual – through his or her place of birth and/or residence – first causally links up with a territory, which – through land(ed) rights embedded in membership titles – is connected to a group, which, in turn, is likely to link up again with the individual through the possible though not necessary connection of a shared culture and/or descent. This ideal-type of autochthony is 'individualized' in the sense that the proclaimed original link between an individual, territory and group is essentially produced through *the presence of individuals*, that is, through their individual place of birth and/or residence in their respective 'presents'. Commonality of place of birth and/or residence thereby simultaneously connects to and constitutes both 'the territory' at issue and, then, 'the group'. Over time, this pattern is likely eventually also to cause commonalities

of culture and/or descent among these individuals unless, of course, these individuals migrate or they are the offspring of migrant parents.

Conversely, cases usually characterized in terms of ‘ethnic’ nationalism or, in fact, ‘autochthony’⁴ can be described as being based on another autochthonous mode that inverts the causal direction of individualized autochthony: within ‘*collectivized autochthony*’, an individual – through shared culture and/or descent – first causally links up with a group, which at some point in its proclaimed past connected itself – through the establishment of land(ed) rights for its members – to a territory, which now in the present is likely to link up again with the individual through the possible though not necessary connection of placing the birth and/or residence of this individual within its own confines. This mode of autochthony is ‘collectivized’ since the proclaimed original link between an individual, territory and group is essentially established through *the past of groups*, distinguishing between ‘earlier-comers’ and ‘later-comers’ to that territory based on alleged ‘collective pasts’.⁵ Shared culture and/or descent serve as the necessary link for an individual to be connected, first, to the group and then to the territory, but group, territory and their interconnection are conceived of as being independent from and prior to the individual. In many cases, this nexus is likely ultimately also to cause the individual to be born and/or to reside within the territory to which his or her community of culture and/or descent proclaims entitlement. Yet this is not necessarily so, as the prototypical case of diasporas demonstrates.

Within this new model of ethnicity based on the causal logic of autochthony, the suggested ideal-typical distinction between individualized and collectivized autochthony can be used to explain why ‘place of birth and/or residence’ and ‘shared culture and/or descent’ are often ambiguously coupled together within discussions of civic and ethnic nationalisms, even though there is no obvious reason for doing so, especially with regard to ‘shared culture and/or descent’. Against the background of this analytical model, however, these couplings do make sense since ‘place of birth’ and ‘place of residence’ are truly interchangeable when it comes to evoking the individualized-autochthonous logic behind ethnicity, while ‘shared culture’ and ‘shared descent’ equally actuate the very same logic of collectivized autochthony.

Another ambiguity built into the civic–ethnic divide can also be avoided by using this model of autochthony: on the one hand, the ‘civic’ and the ‘ethnic’ are typically distinguished by different ingredients. As the above quote from Smith indicates, the ‘civic’ is typically a ‘territorial conception’, while the ‘ethnic’ rather emphasizes the ‘community of birth and native culture’ (Smith, 1991: 9, 11). Yet, only a few pages later in the same text, Smith (1991: 13–14) insists that both models also share ‘certain common beliefs about what constitutes a nation’, and goes on to enumerate these defining ingredients in a way that largely conflates the earlier distinction between ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ nations.⁶ This ambiguity is dissolved within the dichotomy of individualized and collectivized autochthony since this distinction is not based on different ingredients but on different causal directions in which the same elements are *prototypically* linked: individualized autochthony

sees shared culture and/or descent as likely consequences following from place of birth and/or residence, while collectivized autochthony inverts this causality. In other words, no less than collectivized autochthons do individualized autochthons prototypically envision a shared culture and/or shared descent within the territory of the ethnic group. Both only differ in the causal logic they utilize to explain this coincidence. While shared culture and/or descent are the independent variables – the prerequisite of ethnicity – for the collectivized autochthon, they are the likely but not necessary outcomes for the individualized autochthon. This also means, however, that for *both* conceptions, shared culture and/or descent are not simply given but are instead either the independent causes of the ethnic group (in collectivized autochthony) or merely potential effects about which one can never be sure (in individualized autochthony). This turns an ethnicist revival aiming for ‘cultural renewal’ and/or ‘genealogical restoration’ into a potential necessity for *both* the collectivized and individualized autochthon, thus constituting a crucial difference between this model of ethnicity based on autochthony and the classical civic–ethnic divide: for the textbook ‘civic nationalist’, shared culture and/or descent are truly negligible, whereas for the ideal-typical ‘individualized autochthon’, they are not only likely but actually also desirable within his or her quest to come closer to a *prototypical ethnicity* that – to spin further the metaphorical language of the model – ideally consists of a ‘closed causal triangle’. The inverse point can, of course, also be made concerning the potential necessity for *both* the collectivized and individualized autochthon of an ethnicist revival aiming at a restored ‘territorial integration’ that safeguards the ‘place of birth and/or residence’ of ethnic group members against intrusions from outsiders.⁷

This focus on different causal directions rather than different ingredients further permits an explanation of how the autochthonous logic evoked by actors as underlying a particular ethnic identity may easily and abruptly change without any necessary changes in its actual ingredients, namely, when actors begin to inverse the causal direction that allegedly explains the existence of that identity. This also implies that for one and the same ethnic identity, opposed causal logics – that is, individualized- and collectivized-autochthonous variants – may coexist at the same time. This is so because for *prototypical* members of an ethnic group both the individualized and collectivized logic of autochthony typically lead to the very same ethnic triad. It is only in the case of ‘classificatory anomalies’ – that is, immigrants and their offspring as well as diasporas – that the underlying mode of autochthony truly matters as it ideal-typically causes either inclusion or exclusion of these actors into the ethnicity at issue.

Furthermore, it needs to be emphasized that the ideal-typical distinction between individualized and collectivized autochthony allows for numerous empirical variations that result from issues of *scale*, *content* as well as *divergent combinations of defining elements*. Apart from simply drawing territorial boundaries differently, individual autochthons can differ, for instance, concerning the spatial scale that they apply respectively: is the group envisioned to confine its ‘place of birth and/or residence’ to a rather small locale, a region, a ‘country’, a continent,

the world or any territorial configuration in between? Variabilities in the actual content of cultural and/or descent-related criteria used for defining specific collectivized autochthonies also lead to divergent scenarios. Yet scale does play a role here as well, since one and the same cultural marker such as ‘our language’ can be evoked at the level of a dialect, a ‘national’ language, a language family, etc. The same applies to descent-based criteria. Finally it is important to highlight that many empirical cases of ethnicity combine elements from both individualized and collectivized autochthony in their self-definitions. Within one and the same group, members may also use quite divergent individualized- and/or collectivized-autochthonous elements in their attempts to come to terms with their sense of identity (as was just argued in the preceding paragraph), and these definitions may change over time. Many legislations on ‘citizenship’ – itself arguably nothing but the state-sanctioned form of autochthony, that is, *state autochthony* – combine the logics of both individualized and collectivized autochthony in specific ways. That such variations, internal contradictions and changes over time in the autochthonous definitions of an ethnic group do not hinder it from continuing to exist over time – in other words: that an essentialist definition is not a prerequisite for ethnicity – is a point that Fredrik Barth (1969) championed long ago.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that claims to such autochthonous ethnicities are always embedded in specific historical, political and cultural contexts, in which the institutional arrangements of ‘the state’ figure prominently. As my above discussion of empirical cases from Africa and Europe shows, the specificities of states in their increasingly transnationalized frames of reference crucially influence the ways, in which the politics of autochthonous belonging plays itself out: the kind of statehood (liberal-democratic, totalitarian, etc.), the presence and type of an electoral system, the extent of decentralization and relative autonomy of sub-regions, the degree of ethnic heterogeneity, the prominence of economic asymmetries, flows of intrastate and transnational (im)migrants as well as the extent to which the state and its resources remain accessible to its citizenry all profoundly prestructure the field in which claims to autochthonous ethnicity emerge and become meaningful.

State institutions thereby need to be seen in the context of path-dependent histories of layered arrangements that potentially survive from pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial times, both in popular memory and in the set-up of the institutions themselves.⁸ However, not only the evolved nature of actual state institutions but also purely imagined and aspired to forms of statehood play their part. In other words, the multilayered politics of autochthonous belonging takes place with regard to evolving dynamics between *images* and *practices* of statehood (Migdal and Schlichte, 2005). This draws attention to the fact that actual states vary in their capacities to enact in practice the promises entailed in the globalized ideal or image of modern statehood, as highlighted in the somewhat misleading debate on ‘failed states’: to what extent is a single state capable of establishing itself with sufficient credibility regarding its monopoly over the legitimate use of violence within its entire territory, while simultaneously providing and maintaining a civic culture

that sufficiently integrates its citizenry *en masse*? Cases such as the collapsed state of Somalia, where secessionist Somaliland has revitalized the borders of the former British Protectorate, while neighbouring Puntland has activated a discourse of regionalism within an aspired to federal Somalia all against the backdrop of intense antagonisms within a segmentary clan structure (Hoehne, 2009), powerfully illustrate, how the politics of autochthonous ethnicities is profoundly shaped by surrounding state dynamics. However, the state is not only a crucial *context* for the politics of autochthonous belonging, but can also itself become the core *target* of such ethnic processes. Turning to this important issue will finally allow me to combine my theoretical interrogations of various identity-related concepts in anthropology with a political discussion of the alleged fallacies of ‘indigeneity’.

Conclusion: Indigeneity and nationalism as alternative modes for targeting the state

I began this article by briefly summarizing the recent ‘indigenous peoples’ debate stirred by Kuper’s rejection of the notion of ‘indigeneity’, using this discussion as a springboard for exploring the theoretical interrelations between various identity-related notions. Against the backdrop of correlating some apparently contradictory arguments within studies of nationalism, on the one hand, and the recent ethnography of autochthony, on the other, I proposed a model of ethnicity that is principally based on the causal logic of autochthony. This autochthonous ethnicity knows of two ideal-typical logics that get combined in various and divergent ways in concrete cases, namely individualized and collectivized autochthony. As I showed, ethnicities based on such autochthonous conceptions need not be essentialist, even in cases of collectivized autochthony, where individuals, through notions of shared culture and/or descent, link up with a group which, at some point in its proclaimed past, connected itself to a territory through the establishment of land(ed) rights for its members.

Widely accepted working definitions of the term ‘indigenous people’ within the international discourse of politics, law and (at least partly) anthropology emphasize four criteria, namely first-comer, non-dominance, cultural difference and self-ascription (Saugestad, 2001: 43). These definitions reveal ‘indigeneity’ to be a variant of collectivized-autochthonous ethnicity that has been marginalized by dominating later-comers aligning with, and often running, the state, in which this discrimination has taken place. Indigenous people who successfully establish their ‘indigeneity’ hence manage to secure special entitlements *from ‘their’ state* in compensation for discriminations that have been committed against them as earlier-comers by later-comers under the auspices of that very state. This success requires representatives of such indigenous peoples to be sufficiently conversant in the language of human rights and entitlements that is used and understood within modern state structures, and many indigenous people (like the above-mentioned Baka) lack this necessary degree of integration into the state. Becoming more conversant in this westernized culture, however, typically comes with the cost of

losing ‘cultural distinctiveness’ which, in turn, is often expected to be proven in order to substantiate claims to indigeneity in the first place (Thuén, 2006: 24; see also Robins, 2001). Hence, ‘cultural distinctiveness’ or, even worse, continuity with ‘primitive society’ should be abandoned as a *condition sine qua non* for ‘indigeneity’; then, as members of a group of earlier-comers with a distinctive collectivized-autochthonous ethnicity (based on variable and possibly changing definitions), which has been marginalized by later-comers within a state structure, such people stand a fair chance of benefiting from their acknowledged ‘indigeneity’.⁹

Concrete cases of claims to such indigeneity require, of course, authentication by experts. Anthropologists and other social scientists will be, and evidently have been, heavily involved in scrutinizing to what an extent claims for compensation are legitimately based on membership in a collectivized-autochthonous ethnic group that has persisted (based on whatever possible criteria) from a time of state-supported marginalization by later-comers. Like all theoretical concepts that also have a political life beyond the academy, ‘indigeneity’ thereby also constitutes a resource that offers itself to manipulation, leaving experts in a difficult position, in which the boundary between authentication and advocacy becomes blurred and difficult to draw. Yet besides the fact that it seems difficult to maintain a critical distance from any form of colonialism without at least an implicit notion of ‘indigeneity’, it is consoling that Kuper’s propagated alternative – the common good enshrined in individual rights of citizens – hardly escapes these conundrums, but merely mistakes (at best) ‘actually existing’ liberalism for the ideals of liberalism.

In sum: two of the three objections by Kuper against the notion of ‘indigenous peoples’ as mentioned in the introduction crumble, since ‘indigeneity’ needs neither to be based on obsolete anthropological notions of ‘primitive society’ and essentializations of culture nor to necessarily make use of descent as its defining principle. But what about the third objection just alluded to in the last paragraph: that the rhetoric of indigeneity creates new divisions and is less likely to promote the common good than are policies evoking individual rights of citizens within liberal-democratic states? It should not be forgotten that individual rights granted with *citizenship* do not actually escape but, to the contrary, themselves instantiate autochthony merely in a different variety than indigeneity, namely in the form of *state autochthony*. State autochthony equally draws on the criteria of place of birth, place of residence, shared descent and/or shared culture in variable ways (Kenrick and Lewis, 2004: 4) and thereby creates various and divergent boundaries between those who are possibly to benefit as ‘citizens’ and those who are not. Nationalism arguably denotes the ongoing or already successful attempt by autochthonous groups to usurp *the very entitlement of the state itself*, thereby often turning their own autochthonous self-definition into official state autochthony. Ironically, it is precisely this process of promoting the ‘common good’ for citizens thus defined in biased terms of the nationalist majority that typically has been at the root of discriminations against indigenous peoples in the first place.

Thus Kuper is right in that the rhetoric of indigeneity creates new divisions; yet that is precisely the point.

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Notes

1. This apparent 'immediateness' has been variously noted, for instance by Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (2001: 648, 649, 651), who characterize autochthony as 'a naturalizing allegory of collective being-in-the-world', which – in self-styling itself as 'the most 'authentic', the most essential of all modes of connection' – 'natures the nation'. Bambi Ceuppens and Peter Geschiere (2005: 385, 402) highlight the 'apparently self-evident' nature and 'naturalness' of autochthony claims, while Geschiere and Stephen Jackson (2006: 6) speak of autochthony as allegedly based 'on some sort of primordial truth-claim about belonging to the land'. Finally, Geschiere (2009: 2) emphasizes that autochthony 'seems to represent the most authentic form of belonging'.
2. Geschiere (2009: 5) formulates this approach as an explicit research strategy when stating that 'it would be counterproductive to work from a strict definition of this quite enigmatic notion [i.e. autochthony]. My intention is rather to try to follow what meanings and associations people in strongly different situations attach to it, and how it can retain its apparent self-evidence and thus its plausibility in such different contexts.'
3. Jackson (2006: 100–9) is most explicit in this regard when he equates 'ethnicity' with the local, 'nationality' with the national [sic] (i.e. with the state) and 'megaethnicity' with the regional level.
4. Within the recent literature, the empirical cases discussed under the label 'autochthony' invariably fall only into this second type. However, there are passages within this body of texts that already point to the necessity, or at least the possibility, of distinguishing between two opposed modes of autochthony. For instance, Geschiere and Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2000: 442) observe how (this mode of) autochthony typically fetishizes the collective at the expense of the individual without realizing, however, that this situation could also be the inverse. Similarly, Geschiere and Jackson (2006: 7) note as 'an interesting catch' that autochthony literally means 'from the soil itself', while most present-day autochthony movements claim to be first-comers, which implies a movement in the past. Yet the authors fail to acknowledge that this catch might indicate that one cannot only be 'from the soil itself' through a past movement of one's own group but also through one's own individual birth 'from' and/or residence within the present territory.
5. The new ethnography of autochthony usually insists that the contested pasts of groups are typically discussed in terms of which group has 'come first' and what this 'pivotal

historical event' of 'coming first' actually means, namely, possession through discovery or labour (for example, Lentz, 2006b: 48–52). However, even though in many cases of collectivized autochthony these contests about first-comer claims surely prevail, they are not necessarily the only option for this autochthonous mode to be operative. In other words, collectivized autochthony is based on the claim that, in the past of one's own group, a pivotal event such as discovery or labour (or conquest) turned the group and its future members into the legitimate 'owners' of the land, either because the group was (allegedly) first, because the group was (allegedly) there before rival groups (yet after irrelevant others) or because the group has been there for a sufficient length of time to be on an equal footing with even more 'autochthonous' groups. The first case refers to the typical 'first-comer' situation. The second case solves the apparent paradox mentioned by some observers (for example, Jackson, 2006: 113), in which several groups claim to have arrived before some other rival group but after another first-comer group (like Pygmies) that is usually so marginalized and so different in terms of social, political and economic organization as not to constitute any serious challenge within state politics (see also Leonhardt, 2006). (In fact, this second case harks back to the issue of success of 'indigenous' movements in accessing state resources, which will be addressed in the conclusion.) The third case applies for instance to Northern Irish Protestants, who stress their later-comer status as descendants of Scottish and English settlers during the 17th-century Plantations, while simultaneously arguing that they have lived in the region long enough to claim legitimate self-determination. A similar case consists of descendants of colonial settler communities such as white Afrikaners in South Africa.

6. Smith (1991: 14) defines the nation as 'a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members'. Apart from 'shared descent', which is ambiguously left out, all nations – 'civic' or 'ethnic' – thus seem to share, among other things, a territory, land(ed) rights and a culture.
7. According to Smith (1986: 51), ethnicist movements have typically focused on precisely these three elements: 'cultural renewal', 'genealogical restoration' and/or 'territorial integration'.
8. For instance, in many pre-modern states in central and east Africa, Oceania and the Americas, a political culture of 'stranger-kings' prevailed, as described by Marshall Sahlins (1981: 111–12) for Polynesia in the following way: 'It is a remarkably common fact that the great chiefs and kings of political society [in such states] are not of the people they rule. By the local theories of origin they are strangers, just as the draconian feats by which they come to power are foreign to the conduct of the "real people" or "true sons of the land", as Polynesians might express it. [...] Typically, then, these rulers do not even spring from the same clay as the aboriginal people: they are from the heavens or – in the very common case – they are of distinct ethnic stock. In either event, royalty is the foreigner.' I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing my attention to this specific institutional set-up, which apparently invokes the autochthonous logic of ethnicity for a double purpose: in order to determine, by means of inclusion, the socio-territorial body politic and, by means of exclusion, the category of its potential rulers.
9. Using the example of the Mbororo in Cameroon, Michaela Pelican (2009) aptly shows which complexities emerge when the criterion of 'earlier-coming' is given up in the definition of 'indigenous peoples'.

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