

Lapidoth, Ruth. *Autonomy: Flexible Solutions to Ethnic Conflicts.* Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996.

The argument of this book is straightforward. Ethnic nationalism is an increasingly dynamic force in modern history. The trend toward ethnic awareness and the claims for ethnic self-determination do not occur in a vacuum, however. They take place within multiethnic states and involve a potential for intense state-ethnic and interethnic conflict. To cope with this problem, Ruth Lapidoth rejects a broad right of secession both because of the "havoc" it would cause and because of the difficulty of dealing with communities that are ethnically intermingled. The author urges statespersons to look instead to autonomy as a flexible solution that can accommodate state and ethnic demands in varied circumstances. Her pragmatism in this regard is evident: "Autonomy is not a panacea, but only a tool or a framework that can constitute an adequate compromise if the parties are looking for one." (p. 204)

Lapidoth, utilizing a legalistic approach to probe the subject at hand, carefully examines both the concept of autonomy and past experiences with autonomous governance. It is not surprising that she took this approach, as her background includes a professorship of international law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and membership of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague. Lapidoth distinguishes autonomy from other forms of diffusing power (such as federalism, decentralization, and associate statehood) and probes three autonomy arrangements (territorial political autonomy, administrative autonomy and personal autonomy).

She clearly regards the distinction between territorial and personal autonomy as having great significance for the management of ethnic conflict. "A territorial political autonomy," writes Lapidoth, "is an arrangement aimed at granting to a group that differs from the majority of the population in the state, but that constitutes the majority in a specific region, a means by which it can express its distinct identity." (p. 33) The minority group can differ from the community-wide majority in terms of economic practices or religion; for the most part, however, territorial autonomy applies to distinct ethnic peoples living in a specific region of a state.

By contrast, personal autonomy involves all the members of a group regardless of what region or urban center of the country its members reside. Thus, in Estonia and Latvia following World War I, the state permitted certain ethnic minorities the right to establish autonomous institutions to preserve and promote the religious and cultural activities of their group. Unlike territorial autonomy, where the group constitutes a significant element in the population, personal autonomy is relevant in situations where the ethnic minority is interspersed throughout the state. Both types of autonomy are alike, however, in requiring moderate politics and in their willingness to compromise on sensitive issues (as was the case in Greenland and in the Aland Islands). Such limitations help to explain the difficulty of applying autonomy regimes in resource-strapped and deeply divided societies such as Somalia or Sudan.

Although the Lapidoth approach is helpful in examining the legal status of different autonomy arrangements and in examining different historical examples of autonomy outcomes, it is weaker when it comes to analyzing the nature of the particular conflict at hand, the process of negotiations, and the dilemmas of implementation. Evident here is a lack of focus on the dynamic interplay of politics. Why do state and ethnic nationalism make autonomy solutions impractical in certain circumstances? And under what conditions is political bargaining likely to prove a sufficient basis for political negotiations and for the establishment of autonomy agreements that endure over an extended period of time? More systematic attention to the economic dimension in political autonomy arrangements also seems essential, as is the question of external intervention by neighboring states and by coethnics abroad in the internal affairs of deeply-divided societies.

The Lapidoth volume brings together some useful materials of a descriptive and definitional nature. However, because it does not pay sufficient attention to political process, the book seems incomplete. In light of the importance of the subject matter, further research on the question of autonomy arrangements as coping mechanisms might prove practical.

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