

COSMOPOLITANISM: OVERCOMING NATIONAL IDENTITY TO ADDRESS GLOBAL PROBLEMS¹

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Introduction

With a global population of 7 billion people, the world is faced with challenges such as climate change, resource scarcity, global scale migration and global economic crises, likely to lead to widespread conflict. At the end of 2020, 82.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order (UNHCR, 2021).

Addressing such problems requires cooperation among states, especially in a world increasingly interconnected. However, despite significant developments in international law – of which the International Criminal Court is the most prominent development –, the balance of international relations seems unstable and respect for international rule of law seems to wither, judging by recent cases of war of aggression, such as the Iraq war.

This situation makes the case for the “cosmopolitan imperative” (Giddens, 2013: 123). The concept of cosmopolitanism I refer to on this paper is the core idea shared by most views on cosmopolitanism, which we can find in the Stanford encyclopaedia of Philosophy:

The idea that all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, are (or can and should be) citizens in a single community. Different versions of cosmopolitanism envision this community in different ways, some

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focusing on political institutions, others on moral norms or relationships, and still others focusing on shared markets or forms of cultural expression (Kleingeld & Brown, 2019).

I consider that cosmopolitanism is an inevitable form of socio-political organization for humanity. I maintain that the transformation of the world order into a cosmopolitan order is an ongoing process set in motion by globalization. And I understand that globalization refers to fundamental changes in the spatial and temporal contours of social existence, accelerated by technology with far reaching implications in all spheres of human activity: economy, culture, politics (For full definition (see Scheurman, 2018).

Ensuring that we will arrive at fair global political institutions to balance global economic structures is a key test for humanity. To succeed in this endeavour, it is fundamental to look back at some of the most import visions and justifications of cosmopolitanism. For this reason, I will compare Adam Smith's and Kant's visions of cosmopolitanism.

I will attempt to verify whether the Kantian approach has failed because it is contractualist, in that it only applies to the parties in the contract within the nation state. If this is the case maybe Smith's view of the impartial spectator and of sympathy as grounds for morality offers a more secure foundation for universality of ethics, as suggested by Amartya Sen in the preface of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Smith, 2009: xvii-xix).

My hypothesis is that globalization of ethics, or the formation of an ethical cosmopolitanism will have to start with the elimination of the nation state, because I suspect that national identity based on negative referencing is the main obstacle to granting equal respect to all human beings and, consequently, to global cooperation. To examine the formation of national identity I will resort to Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition.

1. Kant's route to perpetual global peace

Kant's ethical theory is grounded on the notion that all human beings, because they possess rational free will, they have equal dignity. Human beings must be seen as ends in themselves. "Kant thinks that our own reason gives us the law." (Schneewind, 2002: 84)

Moral law and its chief principle – the categorical imperative – are, therefore, universal, applying equally to all human beings. From this, naturally, stems Kant's cosmopolitanism.

As Allen Wood reminds us in *Groundworks for the Metaphysics of Ethics* (2002: 176), "Kantian ethics is about having a conception of ourselves which commits us to autonomy, human equality and cosmopolitan community".

However, as we will see, for Kant the transition to a cosmopolitan world needs to account for the existence of states and international relations, which takes him to the sphere of Law.

In the section 53 of *The Science of Right* (1790) Kant describes the world as composed of states living side by side with other groups that form tribes and even races, in the state of nature. Kant sees states as moral persons and therefore as beholders of rights. What Kant calls the right of nations is the right that arises when one state acts towards another, "in the condition of natural freedom and consequently in a state of continual war" (Kant, 1790: section 53). In the philosopher's view, the right of nations includes the consideration of the relation between the people from one state with the people in another state.

Kant argues that the ultimate end of the right of nations is perpetual peace in the form of cooperation among states and formation of supranational governments. This he nonetheless calls an "impracticable idea" (Kant, 1790: section 61, para.1).

He divides the rights of nations into two different circumstances or states: the right of nations in relation of the state of war and the right of nations in relation to the state of peace.

Before looking into the two different situations however, Kant describes the elements of the right of nations. These are as follows: (1) states are viewed as nations and like lawless savages they are in a

non-juridical condition; (2) this natural condition is a state of war; (3) an alliance of nations is necessary; (4) such alliance takes the form of a federation (Kant, 1790: section 54).

To fully understand Kant's idea of cosmopolitanism and in fact how he views politics and ethics at a global level, it is interesting to see his perspective of the right of nations in relation to the state of war. To go to war, for example, citizens must give consent to each declaration of war made by the sovereign—allowing the state to use them. According to Kant war is legitimate only if the state needs to defend its rights and if it is not possible to solve the issue through legal means.

In his perspective, war cannot be punitive because that would be a denial of the equal status of nations, it cannot be a war of extermination or of subjugation because that would imply the moral extinction of another state. In his view, it is contrary to the right of nations that a state “may acquire a condition which from the aggrandizement of its power, might become threatening to other states” (Kant, 1790: section 57, para. 2). Kant's right of nations prescribes that after war, states reach an agreement regarding reparations, equal exchange of prisoners, and amnesty, because: “Neither the conquered state nor its subjects lose their political liberty by conquest of the country (...) for otherwise it would have been a penal war, which is contradictory in itself” (Kant, 1790: section 58, para. 2).

Regarding the rights of peace Kant identifies the following rights for states: the right to neutrality; the right to guarantee continuation of a state of peace; and the right to form alliances.

Comparing individuals to nations, Kant states that a real state of perpetual peace in the world would only be achieved when a universal union of states is formed through a process “analogous to that by which a nation becomes a state” (Kant, 1790: section 61, para. 1). However, he concludes that this is an unrealistic idea because the extension of such union of nations would be so vast and spread-out through such vast regions that “any government of it and consequently the protection of its individual members, must at last become impossible” (Kant, 1790: section 61, para. 1).

The unfeasibility of a world government does not prevent Kant from stressing that the principles that aim at the union of states and

the continuous approximation to such perpetual peace are not impracticable. Because, he argues, this approximation “is a practical problem involving a duty and founded upon the right of individual men and states” (Kant, 1790: section 61, para. 1).

This is how Kant arrives at his proposal of a permanent congress of nations that states join voluntarily and at which they resolve their differences. This voluntary union is different from a union of states based on a political constitution and ultimately to his proposal for a “Universal right of mankind” or “Cosmopolitical right”. Kant starts by distinguishing the field of ethics from the field of right, by making clear that his “rational” idea of a universal peaceful union of all nations is a juridical, not an ethical principle. In his view, nations were scattered across the planet, separated by borders, due to the spherical shape of the globe. Consequently, each inhabitant only has access to a limited part of the soil, “as a part to which everyone has a right” (Kant, 1790: section 62, para. 1).

Kant’s concept of cosmopolitanism is based on the idea that the whole of the world’s soil is shared by all nations which do not have absolute property rights over it. According to the philosopher, nations have the right to enter into commercial relations (‘intercourse’) with other nations, to acquire soil in other nations without conflict:

This right, in so far as it relates to a possible union of all nations, in respect of certain laws universally regulating their intercourse with each other, may be called ‘Cosmopolitical right’ (*jus cosmopoliticum*). (Kant, 1790: Section 62, para. 1)

Finally, Kant sustains that the ultimate purpose of the science of right is universal, long-lasting, peace. And, although he admits that the idealistic vision of universal perpetual peace may never be realized, we have an imperative from practical reason to work towards it.

For although there may be no positive obligation to believe in such an end, yet, even if there were not the least theoretical possibility of action being carried out in accordance to it, so long as its impossibility cannot be

demonstrated, there still remains a duty incumbent upon us with regard to it. (Kant, 1790: Conclusion, para. 1)

2. Adam Smith's Universal benevolence

We now turn to Adam Smith's perspective on cosmopolitanism. To understand it one must understand his system of ethics, which he outlined in his work "The Theory of Moral Sentiments".

Adam Smith's work on ethics dates from 1749 and precedes even Kant's *Groundwork* (1785) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). Contrary to what is commonly thought from interpretations of his work "The Wealth of Nations", Adam Smith did not consider human beings as inherently selfish:

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. (Smith, 1759/2009: 13)

According to Adam Smith feelings of sympathy constitute the grounds for morality. The notion of 'Sympathy', as described by Smith would be closer to what nowadays is called empathy since it involves some reciprocity and feelings that arise from other person's emotions or situation. Feelings which he describes as being like physical pain.

Pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety be made use to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever. (Smith, 1759/2009: 15)

Smith then distinguishes the types of passion that stimulate the feelings of sympathy in the other – the impartial spectator. There are passions that derive from the body (hunger, and all other 'appetites of the body') and passions that derive from imagination, which can be

social or unsocial (love, generosity, kindness, anger, resentment, etc.).

The author further explains that not all passions stimulate sympathy. This is the case of unsocial passions such as hatred and resentment or, to a lesser degree, selfish passions, such as grief and joy. And if we consider all the different passions of human nature, we shall find that they are regarded as decent or indecent, just in proportion as mankind are more or less disposed to sympathize with them. Those passions are then the motor of human conduct and the degree of self-command required to govern over those passions determines the difference between virtue and propriety:

There is in this respect a considerable difference between virtue and mere propriety; between those qualities and actions which deserve to be admired and celebrated, and those which simply deserved to be approved of. (Smith, 1759/2009: 32)

And Smith here offers a simple example related to the passion of hunger. Eating when one is hungry is proper behaviour, but it would be “absurd” to say it is virtuous.

Concern for our own happiness recommends to us the virtue of prudence: concern for that of other people, the virtues of justice and beneficence (...) the first of those virtues is recommended to us by our selfish, the others by our benevolent affections. (Smith, 1759/2009: 308)

And how do we judge our conduct and that of other people? Adam Smith claims that the process to evaluate other people’s conduct is similar to the one used to judge our own conduct. In the first case, we verify whether we can sympathize with the sentiments and motives which have guided the act or behaviour; in the second case, we put ourselves in the position of another person to verify how this person would sympathize with our motives. As Smith puts it: “We endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it” (Smith, 1759/2009: 133).

In spite of the emphasis on impartiality, Adam Smith considers that our sympathy, i.e., affection and our relationship with others is deter-

mined by the proximity we have with them. Therefore, he suggests that our beneficence is stronger in first instance among members of the same family, secondly among members of the same clan or tribe from which they depend for their survival, and lastly among citizens of the same state.

He argues that in more advanced societies – “Where the authority of the law is always perfectly sufficient to protect the meanest man in the state” (Smith, 1759/2009: 263) – the family bonds are weakened and love for our country is strengthened. “Upon account of our connexion with it, its prosperity and glory seem to reflect some sort of honour upon ourselves” (Smith, 1759/2009: 269).

Smith admits that this love for our nation² leads to competition and hostility towards other nations and says that because there is not a “common superior” to solve their disputes, neighbouring nations live in “continual dread and suspicion of one another” (Smith, 1759/2009: 270).

Nonetheless, Adam Smith appeals to the love of mankind to appease the heated competition between nations. He says that the technological advancements and prosperity in one country benefit the whole of mankind and promotes its neighbours’ progress.

Smith concludes that the love of our country is not derived from the love of mankind: “We do not love our country merely as a part of the great society of mankind: we love it for its own sake, and independently of any such consideration” (Smith, 1759/2009: 271). This finding leads Smith to affirm that we have difficulties in effectively extending our public benevolence beyond the borders of our country:

The most extensive public benevolence which can commonly be exerted with any considerable effect, is that of the statesmen who project and form alliances among neighbouring or not very distant nations, for the preservation of, what is called, the balance of power. (Smith, 1759/2009: 271)

Irrespective of this difficulty posed by national borders, Smith argues for universal benevolence. He says that our good-will is not lim-

² The author uses ‘country’ and ‘nation’ interchangeably although he mentions that one country can have more than one nation.

ited by borders “but may embrace the immensity of the universe”, because he stresses: “we cannot form the idea of any innocent and sensible being whose happiness we should not desire” (Smith, 1759/2009: 277).

In his analysis of the influence of culture (custom) in moral sentiments (chapter 2), Smith also makes a claim of universality, arguing that there is a certain threshold of humanity that must be defended independently of the culture. Some practices are simply unjust and unreasonable.

Furthermore, Smith argues that the virtuous man should be willing to see the interest of the state sacrificed for the greater interest of the universe, in the same way he is willing to have his private interest sacrificed to the public interest of his society, and the interest of this society sacrificed for the public interest of the state.

He should, therefore, be equally willing that all those inferior interests should be sacrificed to the greater interest of the universe, to the interest of the great society of all sensible and intelligent things, of which God himself is the immediate administrator and director. (Smith, 1759/2009: 277)

Smith concludes by saying that the administration of the system of the universe and care for universal happiness is “the business of God not of man”.

While Smith’s system of ethics points to universality, his view of an ethical world order is more cosmological than cosmopolitan.

3. Two approaches, one impossibility

Smith’s first edition of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1749) has preceded Kant’s *Groundwork* (1785) and as suggested by Amartya Sen, “it seems quite likely that Kant was influenced by Smith”.

It is, therefore, not surprising that one of the sharpest similarities between the two approaches is the universality of morality. Both philosophers express an intuition that all human beings are deserving of equal respect independently of their race, nationality, or culture.

Furthermore, they both view the sphere of ethics separated from the sphere of politics, especially international relations. Kant says that the ideal of a union of nations is a “juridical principle” not an ethical one. Smith denies his own inclination towards cosmopolitanism, which would be the logical implication of his universal ethics, by saying that the government of the universe is a matter for God not for man. They are moral cosmopolitans but not political cosmopolitans.

Both philosophers view international relations guided by national interest, leading to competition and conflict. However, while Kant equals nations to moral persons, Smith sees nations and states mere forms of social organization (states being more sophisticated than tribes or clans). In Kant’s account (1790), both individuals and nations have the duty to pass from the state of nature to the legal state.

We can observe in Kant and in Smith’s thought a certain idea of human progress of which the cosmopolitan order would be the ultimate end. In Kant’s case it (perpetual peace) is an imperative of practical reason, an aprioristic concept. In Smith’s vision, cosmopolitanism develops as a natural outcome of sympathy towards all fellow human beings and as a logical evolution of human societies. Nonetheless his argument culminates in a cosmological argument where God is presented as sufficient reason or explanation for not further advocating the cosmopolitan vision.

In my perspective, the reasons why Smith and Kant’s accounts fall short of a comprehensive and clear defence of cosmopolitanism are more mundane.

It is reasonable to think that Kant’s conclusion that the Cosmopolitical order is an “impracticable idea” results from his specific context where the existing technology made it impossible to imagine the feasibility of a world government. More than 200 years later, Jurgen Habermas saw the internet as a way for the creation of a transnational communicative space.

More importantly, Kant and Smith run into the problem of nationalism and seem incapable of overcoming it, simply because they overlook it. In this regard Smith’s account goes a bit further since it touches upon the problematic of identity formation:

Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face. (...) Bring him to society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before. (Smith, 1759/2009: 133-134)

In my view, Adam Smith's view of the individual embedded in society is more in line with what has been described in the 20th century as the communitarian position. Kant, however, by introducing the sphere of rights, brings up a perspective of the individual detached from society, ultimately creating what Michael Sandel described as the "unencumbered self" of liberal societies (Sandel, 1984: 81-96) – a free and independent agent capable of choice. "This notion of independence carries out consequences for the kind of society of which we are capable." (Sandel, 1984: 81-96) According to Sandel this notion of 'self' originates in the procedural societies in which we live today in the West, where the struggles for recognition and for resources are taking place.

4. Nationalism and National identity as an obstacle to cosmopolitanism

Nationalism is a product of modernity, of the emergency of public sphere. In essence it describes two phenomena: "(1) the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their national identity; (2) the actions that members of a nation take in seeking to achieve (or sustain) self-determination." (Miscevic, 2020)

I consider that in both cases, but more emphatically in cases of self-determination, nationalism is a result a national identity that is formed on the basis of negative referencing to the other (members of different nations). Kant believes this is a natural problem:

[Nature] uses two means to prevent people from intermingling and to separate them, differences in language and religion, which do indeed dispose men to mutual hatred and to pretexts of war. (Kant, 1795/1983: 367)

Also, Smith reminds us that national identity leads to nationalism: “the love of our nation often disposes us to view with the most malignant jealousy and envy, the prosperity and aggrandisement of any other neighbouring nation” (Smith, 1759/2009: 269).

From my perspective, such negative referencing weakens our natural inclination for viewing all human beings as deserving of equal respect, undermines the strengthening of a global ethics and constitutes the main obstacle to a cosmopolitan order.

In *The Struggle for Recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts* (1995), Axel Honneth, claims that national identity is just one aspect of the individual’s identity, and its relevance can vary significantly with context, according to the other subjects of interaction. According to Honneth identity building is the process of self-realization of the individual. He identifies three different stages in this process corresponding to three forms of recognition: love (emotional support -in primary relationships), rights (cognitive respect-legal relations) and solidarity (social esteem-community of value). The lack of recognition in these corresponding stages will then originate three different types of disrespect: at the level of physical integrity (aggression, maltreatment), at the level of rights (e.g., being arrested for criticizing a political leader) and finally at the level of self-esteem (e.g., prostitutes, in the majority of societies, are denied solidarity because of their lifestyle). As Charles Taylor (1995) would say, identity is shaped by recognition or its absence.

Following Honneth’s model, we must place ‘national identity’ in the third stage of the individual’s formation, related to self-esteem. This brings us to a necessary distinction between citizenship and national identity. It will become clearer if we define citizenship and explain why it is part of the second form of recognition in that same model – legal recognition. As Honneth puts it, with the transition to modernity the identity of the individual previously defined by ‘hon-

our' was replaced by 'respect'.³ This marks the moment when the individual becomes a legal person, with individual, civil and social rights. In addition, Honneth states that "the establishment of each new class of basic rights is consistently compelled by arguments that referred implicitly to the demand for full-fledged membership in the political community" (Honneth, 1995: 116). This membership of the community is what I call citizenship.

As for 'national identity' as a social construction of the secular nationalism is one of the elements of the horizon of references in relation to which we build our identities. Despite this close association with the constitution of the state, I consider that it is out of the sphere of legal recognition and more in the sphere of social esteem. We can find justification for this claim in Honneth's theory: "the question for social esteem is the constitution of the evaluative frame of reference within which the 'worth' of characteristic traits [of the individual] can be measured" (Honneth, 1995: 113).

Thus, one can claim that together with culture, religion, sex and sex-orientation, national identity forms a horizon of reference and adds to the constitution of the evaluative frame of reference to which Honneth refers. This is the sphere that Honneth relates to social solidarity, which he claims, "can only grow out of collectively shared goals" (Honneth, 1995: 178). In my opinion, until the middle of the last century 'national identity' was a symbolic synthesis of these shared goals. Nevertheless, as we will see, the globalization process disrupted this apparent peaceful social order.

4.1 National Identity and globalization

Until very recently, under the framework of the nation-state, (territory with ethnical or cultural unity) citizenship and national identity were overlapping concepts. Often the concept of national identity is still replaced by citizen identity, to reinforce the secular character of the state (Juergensmeyer, 2002: 3-18).

³ An idea that was possible with the introduction, by Kant, of a universalistic conception of morality.

In a context of globalization, which is redefining mostly all aspects of our reality, the concept model of nation-state no longer holds and consequently citizenship is dissociated from nationality (Kastoryano, 2002: 120-136). This is especially the case in multicultural societies, such as France or the Netherlands where minorities, although legally recognized as full-fledged citizens put forward claims for the recognition of their values: religious, cultural, etc.

Parallel to the emergence of these multicultural societies (resulting from global migration movements) we witness the emergence of ethnic and religious nationalism movements which dispute state borders. These movements either aspire to the creation of a new state, to the renegotiation of their relation to the state (like Catalonia) or to the creation of a transnational community of values (Islamism) (Juergensmeyer, 2002: 3-18).

Where does 'national identity' stand in such circumstances? I believe that, although it is still a source of feelings of belonging in some societies (such as the Portuguese), recognition claims⁴ which clearly appeal to the concept of 'national identity' reflect the discomfort and the difficulties in dealing with the challenges posed by globalization. Brought to a formal level of political struggle, these claims strive for the survival of the nation-state. This latter represents in my view a tendency towards a nationalism that would imply re-definition of citizenship and withdrawal of rights already granted. In sum, this trend implies a draw-back in democracy and the return to closed society. The current moral conflict between northern and southern Europe clearly illustrates this tension between the preservation of the nation-state by nationalist elites and the claims for social justice which are spilling over national borders.

⁴ In his "Theory of the Struggle for Recognition", Axel Honneth claims that, contrary to what was sustained by the thinkers of modernity, the moral grammar of social conflicts is the struggles for recognition. In his view, besides material struggles, individuals fight for being recognized by others in society. Their existence depends on the recognition of their identity by others. 'Because the normative self-image of each and every individual human being (...) is dependent on the possibility of being continually backed up by others, the experience of being disrespected carries with it the danger of an injury that can bring the identity of a person to a collapse'. In this sense, disrespect is a denial of recognition (Honneth, 1995: 131-2).

Conclusion: ‘global identity’ as a substitute for ‘national identity’

Kant’s vision of a perpetual peace through a permanent union of nations and Adam Smith’s account of universal benevolence falls short of becoming a successful and strong foundation for an implementable form of cosmopolitanism because they were not able to overcome their prejudice of nationalism. They view the nation-state as an ideal form of social-political organization, nationalism as natural and national identity as inevitable. As Kant puts it:

a powerful and enlightened people should form a republic (which by its nature must be inclined to seek perpetual peace), it will provide a focal point for a federal association of other nations. (Kant, 1983: 356)

Reality, and in particular the experience of the European Union is showing otherwise. A political federation of nations must be formed in parallel with a new form of identity, be it European or global.

Therefore, to make cosmopolitanism viable, I propose the possibility of ‘global identity’ as a substitute for ‘national identity’. Such global identities already exist, but not yet in reference to global democratic values, rights and /or institutions. They are either a result of economic globalization or of religious expansionism.

Nowadays there are transnational movements based on religion that aspire to a global sphere of influence and that are creating global identities (such as the expansionist Islamism of the Islamic State movement). However, these are not the only types of ‘global identities’ that have already come to existence (Jenkins, 2002: 66-84). Transnational corporations (like Toyota or McDonalds) are creating a kind of global identity, either occupational identities (the corporation as a global family), or by consumption values. However, because these transnational corporation activities profit from the existence of separate states and markets it is possible that they “are likely to discourage and obstruct the emergence of transcendent global identities” (Jenkins, 2002: 66-84).

A final possibility for the advent of a global identity is based in the idea of a ‘shared humanity’, an idea that informed the establishment

of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Universal Human Rights. This possibility has fierce opponents, many among the defenders of Liberalism as they consider that Human Rights entail a very 'thick conception of the good'. Nonetheless, I consider they can at least constitute a global horizon of reference. Effectively, they already constitute the base for claims of recognition from many different origins, even from those who aspire to create global identities based on religious belief. The best example of this is the claim of Islamic communities for the right of Muslim women to cover their faces (in France, The Netherlands and UK). They base this claims in the Right of Freedom of Religion.

For Honneth an active politics of Human Rights that involves both states and civil organizations makes some sense:

There is hardly any region in the world where one does not find church associations, scattered intellectual groups, and organized international groups calling for political support from abroad to help in the struggle for human rights. (Honneth, 2007: 214)

To conclude, I believe the individual's identity can be built with a reference to global values or horizons of reference, and that is even necessary, in the context of globalization. Certainly, we will always have social and cultural groups of interaction from whom we need recognition but that does not have to be the 'nation-state'. More and more we will work, live and interact in multicultural environments.

National Identity is, therefore, not fundamental for the individual self-esteem nor for the formation of stable social and political institutions, especially not in the context of an effective globalization. In the meantime, while the process is running, it is to be expected that different types of identity co-exist.

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