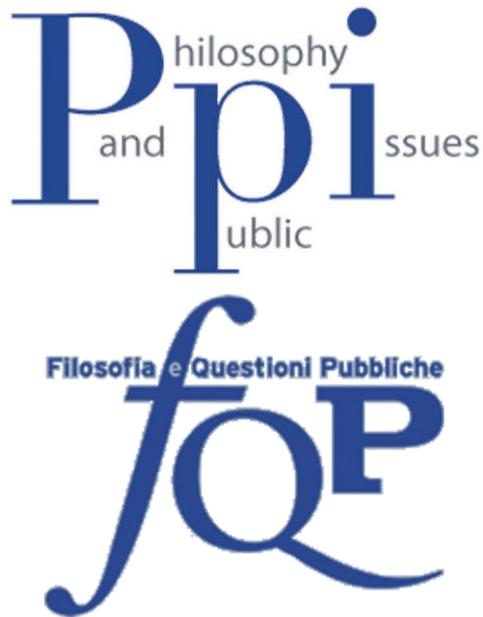# IDENTITY, IDENTIFICATION AND THE 'INVENTION' OF NATION

BY

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Identity, Identification
and the 'Invention' of Nation

Franco Manti

Introduction

Appiah's book *The Lies that Bind. Rethinking Identity* offers an important contribution to reflection on the topic of identity, which has become central for ethics and political philosophy starting from the 1990s. I would like to dwell upon two issues, among others: the attribution of identity in relation to recognition (Appiah 2019, 3-32) and the construction of national identity (*ibid.*, 73-77). In which sense are identities "lies that bind"? How did the transition from the attribution of identity to individuals to attribution of identity to nations happen? If nations have been invented, in the face of the emergencies of our times, should we re-invent them?

In order to attempt an answer to these questions, I propose both a historical-genetic and a conceptual pathway, which can be summarised as follows: 1. An analysis of a number of theoretical accounts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, concerning what we now call recognition, shows the non-essentialistic nature of identity and how, as opposed to what used to happen in the classical world, through *anagnorisis*, it has acquired an intersubjective and attributive characterisation to the extent of determining priority criteria, distinctions and the donation of fully-fledged identity "assets"; 2. Political Romanticism based on an essentialistic interpretation of identity has operated a "transfer" of attributive identity from individuals to nation states; 3. The most sustainable answer to essentialistic interpretations, both Romantic and current, consists in considering a nation as a construct in which political and extra-political phenomena are combined through an integration process. 4. Since the recognition of a common identity as members of the human race evoked by Appiah is fact (we are all, men and women, *homo sapiens*), makes *anagnorisis* become topical again and goes hand in hand with today's ethical and political challenges which cannot be faced at national level. Awareness of this leads to the identification of a shared ethos and the construction of a social imaginary acting as a framework for a new integration of the cultural and the political dimension, which may "re-invent" the nation both in terms of rulers vs. ruled relations, and in terms of constructing a world governance who may be able to tackle the current emergencies.

I

From distributive conflict to identity conflict

In the early 1990s, in political theory, a shift in the focus of interest takes place from distributive to identity conflict (cf. Veca

1995, 7). A.M. Schlesinger Jr.'s book, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*,[1] is perhaps the best written representation of this transition. The dynamics described by Schlesinger underline the connection between the construction of identities, both individual and collective, and recognition strategies. He highlights the political relevance of the definition of national identity and of the cohesion of nation-states. Considering the United States as a reference frame, Schlesinger goes as far as envisaging the end of the melting pot and *The Disuniting of America.* Reflection on the forms and modes of recognition is fundamental, since they constitute the process through which personal and cultural identity is defined, that is, what Appiah calls labelling: "[…] every identity comes with labels, so understanding identities requires first that you have some idea about how to apply them" (Appiah 2019, 8). Such labelling concerns not only individuals and groups, but also nations (*ibid.*, 73-77).

II

Anagnorisis and the problem of the identity-truth relationship

In ancient Greek, the word for recognition is ἀναγνώρισις (*anagnorisis*). The term means a particular form of knowledge not characterised by a transition from ἄγνοια (*agnoia*), lack of knowledge, to γνῶσις (*gnosis*), knowledge, but by a 'retrieval' or

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[1] See Schlesinger 1998. Published a couple of years before *Political Liberalism*, it functions in a way as a basis for it. Here I will not look into the complex questions dealt with in *Political Liberalism* and the debate originating from it. Rather, I would like to highlight how Schlesinger's analysis is relevant to understand the nature and problems of pluralism, which Rawls considers as fact, see: Rawls 2005, xiv-xix and 47-68; Ottonelli 2010, 166. For an analysis of *Political Liberalism,* see Maffettone 2010, 79-137; Manti 2012, 71-96.

'recovery' of something that was in one's knowledge beforehand. For the Greeks "[…] recognition expresses a deep relationship with truth: mainly, the truth of an identity; sometimes, the truth of a status" (Manfredi 2004, 11). Truth is in turn defined as a principle of correspondence between what is and what humans say. For this reason, *anagnorisis* plays a fundamental role in the plot of dramatic works (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1452a 36) and in literature. Recognition is pivotal in the lives of characters, but for the spectator, who knows the characters and, more often than not, already knows the plot too, this is about θέα (thea), i.e. a show. Through the ups and downs of characters, however, recognition expresses something going beyond sheer poetic representation: it tells the plot in which one gets lost, as is the case with Oedipus, or one becomes oneself again thanks to the intervention of others, as is the case with Ulysses (Manfredi 2004, 13-24). Plato mentions *anagnorisis* in *Theaetetus* where it consists in recognising among different feelings the one contributing to shape appropriate knowledge (Plato *Phaedrus* 72e; *Meno* 81d). *Anagnorisis* implies the selection or identification of a sensible experience giving functional clues to the knowledge of truth. In other words, there comes to be a correspondence between a phenomenal datum and episteme, that is, knowledge, which imposes itself as true because it is unassailable, as opposed to false opinion (Theaetetus, 193c). *Anagnorisis* has therefore to do with a relational process between the one who recognises and those who are recognised. Both in its literary and philosophical form, it remains within the scope of physicality and does not concern the attribution of values or meanings.

III

Identity as a construct

From the forensic person to Hume's 'problem'

According to Manfredi "the accelerations undergone by the changes in modern subjectivity have produced, as early as in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, accomplished theoretical elaborations of the category of recognition, even when the term was still not in use" (Manfredi 2004, 6). I believe, however, that in the seventeenth century the topic of subjectivity and of recognition in relation to identity already acquires philosophical importance along with the emergence of individualism and of attention to the subject. Zarka not only highlighted this importance, but also emphasised – very appropriately, to my mind – how misleading it is to insist only on the way inaugurated by Descartes, which makes the determination of the 'ego' as a subject and the related sovereignty of self-referential subjectivity the interpretative key of the whole development of modern philosophy. Another way also exists, the one walked by natural law, which, in contrast with Cartesian metaphysics, builds on a subjectification of law to reach the "invention" of the subject of law.[2] The most significant contribution in this connection is Locke's. He devotes chapter XXVII of Book II of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* to an exploration of identity and diversity. After defining human identity in merely physical terms (Locke 1975, Book II, Chap. XXVII, 6, 331-332), he gives a psychological definition of personal identity: a person is "[…] a thinking intelligent Being that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by the consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and a sit seems

[2] See Zarka 2000. Besides Locke, Zarka takes into consideration Grotius, Hobbes, Cudworth and Leibniz.

to me essential to it: It being impossible for any one to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive" (*ibid.*, Book II, Chap. XXVII, 9, 335). Hence, it is consciousness to be constitutive of personal identity, but also of the possibility of self-identification. (*ibid.*). Consciousness, therefore, combines lives and actions far away both in time and in immediacy, to construct the same person. As a consequence, self-identification is possible only through reference to our experiences (§ 17, 341), so that personal identity does not consist in the identity of substance, but in the identity of consciousness (§ 19, 342). Also identification by others happens with reference to actions, so much so that there must be a distinction between human being and person. Such a distinction is of fundamental importance in order to understand the origins of the "way" invoked by Zarka. If consciousness constitutes a person and their recognition happens with reference to the actions performed, then law and the justice of reward and punishment have their foundations in personal identity (§ 18, 341). Human law, in fact, does not inflict punishment on madmen (§ 20, 342-343 and § 24, 345). These considerations on identity are a bridge connecting self-consciousness with a definition of the person, so that together they give it shape as a moral subject and law body, since actions and their merit are concerned. It must be said that this definition is not in contrast with the psychologistic approach to be found in the preceding sections of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Rather, it is a consequence of it, making it also possible to introduce a social dimension in recognition: wherever one may find what they call themselves, there somebody else may say they find the same person. With reference to the person, therefore, Locke says: "It is a Forensick Term appropriating Actions and their Merit; and so belongs only to intelligent Agents capable of a Law, and Happiness and Misery" (§ 26, 346-347). Thus, the term person has to do with what one concretely does, with the moral value of actions, but also with the law and with rewards and sanctions in

consequence of our doings. In this sense, "person" defines the moral subject and the subject of law together, and has much to do with the ways in which one is identified and judged both on the ethical and, when necessary, on the juridical level. To sum up, Locke provides a fundamental contribution to a modern re-definition of subjectivity with reference to identity construction processes, to identification, and he casts the basis for a notion of the individual as a socialised being, already in the state of nature, which he examines in *Two Treatises of Government* (*ibid.*, II II, 4-8, 106-108 and *ibid.*, II, VII, 77, 138). Furthermore, the juridical conception of 'person' provides recognition with an attributive characterisation which relates actions to merits.

Hume agrees with Locke on his non-substantialist, non-ego-self-referential notion of personal identity, and he proposes a specific interpretation of the above-mentioned characterisation of recognition. In short, according to Hume, the identity we ascribe to the human mind is fictitious. It is unable to unify the different perceptions coming from the outside world. Each perception entering the mind remains distinct, distinguishable, different and separable from any simultaneous or subsequent perception. As a consequence, "When I turn my reflexion on *myself,* I never can perceive this *self* without some one or more perceptions; nor can I ever perceive any thing but the perceptions. 'Tis the composition of these, therefore, which forms the self" (Hume 1896, "Appendix," 634). According to Hume, attributing an identity is an attempt to unify and stabilise a reality taking on changing and unsettled forms. The identity of things and personal identity are reflected one into the other, either of them requires the other and originates successive egos. Thus, personal identity emerges as an unstable plurality of successive egos in a relational structure. Hence Manfredi is right when he affirms: "recognition is something that is repeated and renewed again and again, each time by exerting

performativity in the form of renewed attributions or re-institutions" (Manfredi 2004, 96).

Up to this point, Hume seems to be missing the intersubjective dimension Locke had attached to the "forensic person" and that is already present in the state of nature, because of human inclination to sociality. In order to understand the relationship between the individual dimension of identity and the social dimension of recognition, or rather, of the recognised identity, in Hume's treatment of this subject, I believe reference must be made to the *impasse* he himself identifies:

> The present philosophy, therefore, has so far a promising aspect. But all my hopes vanish, when I come to explain the principles that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness. I cannot discover any theory which gives me satisfaction on this head. In short there are two principles, which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz, *that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences,* and *that the mind perceives any real connexion among distinct existences* (*ibid.*, 635-636).

The problem encountered by Hume, therefore, is how to save an identity principle without making any concessions to a substantialist vision of the ego or to gnoseological realism. Appealing to the "privilege of a sceptic" (*ibid.* 636), he does not reach any conclusions, but he nevertheless casts the basis for a distinction between knowledge and recognition. By reprising the distinction between man and person, theorised by Locke (1975, Book II, Chap. XXVII, 21-22, 343-344), Hume considers as the object of knowledge what is permanent in time (possibly, with varying degrees of intensity) and what makes it possible to perceive also what has changed when recalled by memory, and, building on

that experience, allows for recognition to happen. Hume's conception is non-substantialist and relationist, whereby identity concerns past experiences intended not only in their biological and psychic, but also in their biographical sense. Identity relating to man in his biological and psychic features is an object of knowledge; identity as a system of relations, as a plurality of ever-changing existences does not constitute an objective datum. It displays features that are "established" as being defined in time, and therefore it is the object of recognition. The biographical and relational dimension of recognition represents a fundamental link to explain the intersubjective and attributive characterisation of identity. In the light of this, individuating identity implies three factors: the attribution of a name that is conventional; the attribution of a status concerning one's social standing; the attribution of a role concerning what an individual does or is supposed to do. Thus, identification, intended as an identity-attributing process, presupposes the existence of social relations and is made possible by the consensus of a plurality of persons: "Identity's reliance on procedures related to recognition acts has progressively introduced the figure of the other in its communitarian sense into the identity construction process" (Manfredi 2004, 103). Identity therefore emerges as a construct based on the consensus by many concerning the identity of one – a public image enabling re-identification in time[3] which may combine aspects remaining stable with aspects that may be changed, but that may be traced back to that identity by comparison.

[3] See on the topic Sparti 2003, 151.

IV

The gaze of others

In the introduction to *The Lies That Bind*, Appiah narrates how taxi drivers, in different parts of the world, try to size him up as soon as he gets into their cars. In so doing, they put their expertise to the test. The result of these attempts is interesting because, depending on the locations, he is assigned different labels (Appiah 2019, xi). This exemplifies two relevant aspects peculiar to the identity attribution process: the immediate need to give the interlocutor a label in order to relate to him; the conditioning of contexts, cultures, socially shared stereotypes on recognition and identity attribution.

This and many other examples in Appiah's book help us understand how the attempt to labelling on the basis of belonging is not that innocent, since the question taxi drivers are trying to answer is in fact: "what are you?" (*ibid.*). Such a question implies a transition from identification as a form of cognitive recognition to identity as attributive recognition. In this transition, the gaze of the other establishes a connection between the recognising community and to the one which is recognised.

It was mainly Rousseau and A. Smith who emphasised that "what lies at the root of recognition is not, therefore, an interpersonal relationship, but the consideration of one by many others, society's qualified attention to the individual" (Manfredi 2004, 105).

In *A Discourse upon the Origin and the Foundation of the Inequality among Mankind*, recognition – although Rousseau does not use this term[4] – is strictly linked to civilisation, since it causes the human

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[4] See Taylor 1992, III, 35 and 44, where he states: "I thought that Rousseau could be seen as one of the originators of the discourse of recognition."

to become apart of oneself and to become dependent of things and of others. Comparing the savage with the civilized man, it may be noted how the former is less skilful, but self-sufficient (Rousseau 2013, Part I, 17). The savage does not have to use any tricks or devices; the civilised man, on the other hand, has to recur to tools that are external to him to survive. It is a man who, abandoning his natural condition, becomes other than himself, alienated.[5] This alienation is at the origin of the need to relate to others. Civilisation, with its organised common exploitation of the external world through its tools making human activity ever more efficient and productive,[6] produces two successive consequences: the first is mutual dependence for the satisfaction of needs, the second is dependence on other people's opinion, to the point that everybody's life ends up being conditioned by it. Becoming sociable, humans depend on the gaze of others and become slaves of public reputation, which represents a backdrop against which there emerge inequalities, social hierarchies and relations characterised by "[…] a deceitful and frivolous exterior, honour without virtue, reason without wisdom, and pleasure without happiness" (Rousseau 2013, Part II, 104). The civilised man's life is therefore conditioned by appearances or, even better, by how one appears to and is identified by the gaze of others. It is the satisfaction of ever-growing needs through the expansion of consumption and luxury,[7] to make the man who lives according to appearances a slave to the means, and he himself a means. The

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[5] According to Starobinski, this analysis by Rousseau foreshadows Hegel's and Marx's; see Starobinski 1998, 55-56.

[6] Rousseau points out that, as long as nobody aspired to works requiring the joint collaboration of many people, man remained in himself. It was above all the introduction of agriculture to impose the need for joint work and mutual dependence. See Rousseau 2013, Part II, 70-72.

[7] See on the topic Forni 1976, 11.

civilised man's condition poses two interesting questions: 1. Is other people's esteem always a negative factor?; 2. Is the civilised man's life condition unavoidable? With regard to (1), Rousseau believes esteem plays a different role with respect to equality. He relates esteem to the attribution of honour which, in the *ancien régime*, as underlined by Montesquieu, requires *préférences* e *distinctions* (Montesquieu 1950, Tome I, Livre III, Chap. 7, 33) thus generating inequalities.[8] Rousseau identifies in the Greek *polis* the societal model that might enable us at least to contain *préférences* and *distinctions*, that is, the perverse effects produced by recognition and attribution of identity on the basis of a modern conception of honour. Obviously this is an idealised model of the *polis* intended as a republic[9] in which citizens are equal as such, and are also mutually dependent, like all civilised men, but their dependence is among equals and expresses itself in the public space. The political expression of this equality is the direct democracy exerted in the *agora*, allowing for the citizen to empathise with the institutions and to recognise the civil virtues of the value of pity, which is the very foundation of morality,[10] of solidarity and of wisdom. The interpretation we may deduce from Rousseau's words is that in a republic like the one he idealises dependence is, in fact, an interdependence that does not lead to alienation because it

[8] To explain the attribution of *préférences* and *distinctions*, Rousseau makes reference to public events such as shows and sports games: in ancient Greece, participation was egalitarian and there were no distinctions, whereas in the modern world, shows are an opportunity for ostentation, in which recognition on the basis of honour reaches a discriminating identity attribution (for example, through seat allocation) and does exclude, as is the case with those who cannot afford buying tickets. On the function of shows, please see Rousseau 2019.

[9] In its Latin sense of *res-publica*, which is the equivalent for the Greek notion of πολιτεία (politeia)

[10] See Rousseau 1990, 92 and 1999, Livre IV, 261-265; 2013, note XV, 219, where Rousseau says, with reference to pity: "[…] produit l'humanité et la vertu".

happens among equals. Such an interdependence is made possible by symmetrical reciprocity and by a shared commitment towards the affirmation of virtue. The virtuous citizen, as the result of an appropriate citizenship education, is not heterodirected, since he obeys to himself as a member of a community the ethical and political values of which, together, are constitutive of the "general will". A similar context makes the search for esteem compatible with freedom and social cohesion because, as Taylor observes, in Rousseau's ideal society "all the virtuous will be esteemed equally and for the same (right) reasons.[…] Paradoxically, the bad other dependence goes along with separation and isolation the good kind, which Rousseau doesn't call other-dependence at all, involves the unity of a common project, even a 'common self'."[11] In this way, Rousseau foreshadows a topic that will be elaborated on by Herder some time later, that is, authenticity towards oneself, which is impossible in a honour-dominated society, where men are conditioned by that gaze of others that enslaves them to opinion and recognises, identifies and esteems them on the basis of *préférences* and *distinctions*. Recognition thus loses its ethical characterisation and is reduced to an order control instrument in a society of necessarily unequal members.

Some years after Rousseau's *Discourse*, Adam Smith publishes *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where, in spite of a certain language affinity, he develops a theory that is "alternative" to Rousseau's as far as the social dimension of recognition and of attributive identity is concerned. Even in Smith's essay, the gaze of others plays a fundamental role. Manfredi emphasises that, according to Smith, the advantage we aim to obtain when we pursue an improvement of our condition is not only an economic advantage, but also a visibility one. Those who succeed in life obtain consideration, gratification and approval; hence, differences in rank and status are

[11] Taylor 1992, 49; on common self, see Rousseau 1959, 244.

also differences in visibility (Manfredi 2004, 54) and "Society is established and maintained neither by the recognition of virtue, nor by the value of wisdom, nor, least of all, by solidarity towards the weak, but by the attraction of power and by the fascination of fortune and wealth" (*ibid.*, 58). This means that, in Smith's thought, the ethical side of recognition would become marginal in terms of the function of keeping rank and status distinctions to guarantee order and stability. Its role comes down, at the most, to reinforcing social cohesion. In my opinion, Manfredi's interpretation is partial as it does not take into consideration some important elements of Smith's thought: the role of propriety, the relationship among inequality, the division of labour, progress and increased prosperity. That he entitles the whole of part I of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* "The Propriety of Action" is telling. Smith immediately establishes a connection between propriety and sympathy, the latter enabling us to feel happy about the joys of others and to feel sorry for the afflictions of others. The book's incipit is definitely explanatory: "How selfish soever man 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 2010, Part I, Sect. I, Chap. I, 9). Sympathy, at the basis of the propriety judgement, acquires a social dimension through the medium represented by the impartial and well-informed spectator, the man within, the breast, the great judge and arbiter of men's conduct. Smith therefore identifies two courts of judgement: "The jurisdiction of the man without is founded altogether in the desire of actual praise, and in the aversion to actual blame. The jurisdiction of the man within is founded altogether in the desire of praise-worthiness and in the aversion to blame-worthiness" (*ibid.*, Part. III, Chap. II, 91). The spectator is impartial and sympathetic at the same time: his impartial gaze allows for a conception of him as an average social ego through which the

sense of propriety and of justice corrects the natural inequality of our feelings. The sympathy we feel for successful persons, from which our admiration of them derives, has a twofold function: it encourages us to improve ourselves and, at the same time, represents a source of social cohesion. While emphasising how such an admiration is a source of corruption of our moral sentiments (*ibid.*, Part I, Sect. III, Chap. III, 45-48) Smith also observes: "The distinction of ranks, the peace and order of society, are in a great measure, founded upon the respect which we naturally conceive for the former [the rich and fortunate]. The relief and consolation of human misery depend altogether upon our compassion for the latter [poor and wretched]. The peace and order of society is more important than even the relief of the miserable" (*ibid.*, Part VI, Sect. II, Chap. I, 156). Are we facing inconsistency or aporia? According to Manfredi, neither of them, for the reasons mentioned above. To my mind, there is a different explanation: the impartial sympathetic spectator encourages admiration and respect for the powerful and high-rank persons while mitigating them through moral awareness of their possible degeneration. This allows such a spectator to set limits to these feelings and to conceive of ranks as something that is not given once and for all. In short, Smith's position does not exclude social mobility, so much so that constitutional changes and revisions are to be ascribed to the mobility in rank or of the status of the "subordinate parts" within a state (*ibid.*, Part. VI, Sect. II, Chap. II, 159). Smith's position is still better understood if one considers his analysis of inequality – a central theme in his thought, just like in Rousseau's. Despite the different assessments of its genesis and function, both of them reach the same conclusion: modern society puts an end to the inequalities characterising the *ancien régime*, but produces new ones (Smith 1978, 562-582). The dynamics induced by capitalism "[…] proves progressive and basically egalitarian under some respects, unequal and contradictory under some other.

[…] In Smith, this ambivalence permeates *Wealth* entirely and becomes a dominant trait of the analysed system" (Gioia 2016, 46). On the one hand, wealth is increased, on the other new forms of inequality are developed which trigger a deterioration of social relations. After all, division into social classes is inevitable not only because social conventions set it as a model, but also because the production of social wealth is based on it.[12] The division of labour, becoming more marked and increasingly characterising developed and civilised societies, determines economic growth, but hinders the development of workers' subjectivity, whose vast majority ends up doing a very small number of simple operations, which has a brutalising effect on them: "[…] this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes some pains to prevent it" (Smith 1981, Book V, Part III, Art. II, 782). The division of labour, therefore, represents a point of reference for recognition and identification on the social level, on the basis of the positioning of individuals in productive processes. If you compare what emerges from *The Wealth of Nations* with *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, identity is attributed on the basis of each individual's social status and the appropriateness of actions pointed to by the impartial spectator in consideration of such status.

In short, like Rousseau's, Smith's account implicitly poses the problem of authenticity, but this problem is not developed.

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[12] See on this issue Raffaelli 2001, 92-94.

V

Attributive recognition and the allocation

of identity 'assets'

Ranging from the forensic person to the function of the average social ego performed by the impartial spectator, it has been so far illustrated that identity is a 'construct', the outcome of recognition processes in which the gaze of others expresses a social consensus on the individual's identity and allows for its re-cognisability over time.[13]

Moreover, the identity produced by attributive and axiological recognition which, starting from Locke, characterises modernity, allocates intangible assets, such as honour, dignity, respect, "identity assets,"[14] on which those who are recognised depend for an indefinite time. A consequence of this is that recognition by others strengthens self-awareness in those who are recognised and enables them to self-identify in the light of such "assets"; another consequence, however, is that they are exposed to changes, variations or even elisions in their allocation. On the positive side of it, attributive recognition confirms status and social bonds and makes a certain degree of inequality socially acceptable. Although Locke and Smith dealt with this matter in different terms, they hold that identity assets should be allocated according to a sort of shared performance principle. Rousseau believes that the State intervention is needed (which also Smith considers), both on the normative and on the institutional level, with the aim of allocating the dignity 'asset' through the control of economic processes and education in the civil virtues. On the negative side of it, attributive recognition may deny somebody the above-mentioned 'assets' due to stereotypes and prejudice used to 'justify' discriminatory

[13] On the construction of public image, see Sparti 2003, 151.
[14] See *ibid.*, 147

individual behaviours and policies. Stereotype and prejudice also generate misrecognition and denial. The former consists in a primary refusal of recognition.[15] The latter, on the other hand, consists in the cancellation of ongoing recognition.[16] Hence, misrecognition and denial contribute to the creation of identity and to the revision of attributed identity. Taylor points out – and rightly so – that misconception "[…] can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. […] misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred" (Taylor 1992, 25-26) (but this also applies to denial).

VI

Authenticity and *Volksgeist*

In my brief reconstruction of Rousseau's thought, I emphasised the relevance acquired by the civilised man's separation from himself and his difficulty following the moral sense that is within us and that is *per se* the source of our morality. Also Smith believes that appropriate behaviour is to be ascribed to the influence and authority of conscience, to the call from the man within, that is, from the impartial spectator defined as "[…] the great judge and arbiter of our conduct" (2010, Part III, Chap. III, 95). Rousseau and Smith are therefore a landing point for the individualization of subjectivity typical of modernity, for which telling right from wrong, differently from what Locke thought, was not founded on conformity of action to the obligation deriving from the law of nature and rationally deducible from the latter, but on the moral

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[15] Consider, for example, discrimination on the basis of race or gender.
[16] This is the case of Nazi or Fascist racial laws.

sense inherent in every human being.[17] Once the normative reference to the law of nature has failed, however, such a landing point poses a problem: how can we possibly be authentic, faithful to our conscience, when we live in a society in which attributive recognition determines identity and the allocation of the 'assets' that go with it, and at the same time we are exposed to misrecognition and denial?

The issue of authenticity, remaining in the background of Rousseau's and Smith's accounts, was interpreted as an ideal by Herder, according to whom everybody has their own measure, their own frame of mind, their own instincts (Herder 1887-1909, VII, I, 291). This diversity, constitutive of humankind, acquires ethical relevance: each life is irreducibly unique and nobody can be compelled to live it according to somebody else's precepts or needs. According to Taylor, this is a "[…] powerful moral ideal that has come down to us. It accords moral importance to a kind of contact with myself, with my own inner nature, which it sees as in danger of being lost." (Taylor 1992, 30). Practising the ideal of authenticity, therefore, means walking the path of self-fulfilment and self-realisation. To my mind, the most significant novelty in Herder's view, in terms of its vast influence,[18] lies in the widening of the authenticity ideal from the individual to the people (*Volk*), in which the individual is recognised and recognises himself or herself.

According to Herder, the transition from 'me' to 'us' is unescapable for the affirmation of authenticity, because it is an inherent characteristic of human beings to be part of a community

[17] A fundamental passage in this process is the theory of moral sense developed by Hutcheson 2004, Treatise II, Introduction, 85-88, Treatise II, Sect. I, 92-93, where Hutcheson affirms: "It is plain we have some secret Sense which determines our Approbation without regard to Self-Interest" (92).
[18] See Larmore 1987, 130 and 1996.

and inherit its traditions which are the only means enabling us to effectively understand what we are and what we should be. Thus, the community is the natural condition in which humans live (Herder 1967, 46, 94, 102-106) so much so that our comprehension of the requirements of morality depend on it. This poses problems of consistency with the theory: how is it possible to practise the way of self-fulfilment and self-realisation if humans in their moral self-understanding are bound by the traditions of the society in which they live? The answer that may be retrieved from Herder's text is that the habitual ways of living and conceiving of the world are not chosen by us, but received by the social reality surrounding us. Our independence is therefore limited. Taking a critical view on cosmopolitan universalism, he states: "The blurred heart of the indolent cosmopolitan is a shelter for no one. Do we not then see, my brothers, that nature has done everything she could, not to broaden, but to limit us and to accustom us to the circumference of our life" (Herder 1887-1909, VIII, V, 203). What we should aim to is a balance between authenticity and appearance, but such a balance is made extremely precarious by the pursuit of an ideal of good life that is only possible within a communitarian social context. As a matter of fact, Herder ends up by referring pluralism to communities interpreted as bodies where the whole encompasses its parts and its parts are an expression of the whole. The precarious balance between autonomy and appearance is cancelled: belonging represents "[…] the heart of all Herder's ideas" (Berlin 1976, 195). The social holism that Herder believed to derive from the Greek *polis* led him to such an overlapping of community, State and nation that the most natural state is thus *one* people, with *one* national character (Herder, 1887-1909, IX, IV, 249-265). Hegel is responsible for the idea that recognition implies an obligation of reciprocity between the individual and the community. Through the master-slave dialectic, he demonstrates that one's identity is determined by the modalities of recognition

adopted by others.[19] On this basis, he develops a theory according to which identity attribution and reciprocity obligation concern above all the relationship between individuals and communities, because the identity that is recognised positions itself with reference to and within the community it recognises. The nation-State is the moral community *par excellence*, the expression of the *Volksgeist*, of the spirit of an entire people, "[…] the actuality of the ethical Idea. […] We should therefore venerate the state as an earthly divinity" (Hegel 2009, § 257, 201 and Addition to § 272, 224-225). This is the basis for the theory of *Sittlichkeit*,[20] according to which institutions not only allow for the possibility of pursuing each individual's moral ideals, but also promote moral development, so that the ideal of authenticity, intended as the affirmation of the deep ego in every human being, is only possible as an expression of belonging to the nation-state.

Apart from the difficulty demonstrating the existence of a deep ego,[21] this essentialist and expressivist notion of the nation-state does not take into account two facts: within states there might be sub-national moral communities; transnational moral communities do exist. As a consequence of this, the value of a moral community cannot be compressed or identified with the nation-state and, differently from the Greek *polis*, the sense of belonging is not mainly or exclusively political. Moreover, in the name of an ethical state, the liberal principle of political neutrality towards

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[19] See on the topic Honneth 2008, 15-32.
[20] See, concerning this section, Zolfagharieh 2009.
[21] I think the thesis, upheld by Girard, that authenticity, so intended, is a lie, may be shareable. See Girard 1961.

controversial notions of good life fails,[22] with all the consequences this has on tolerance and individual freedoms.

VII

Two developments of political Romanticism

Differently from Hegel, Herder had taken into consideration the existence within a state of a plurality of moral communities. The central position he assigns to belonging may take two forms. On the one hand, it allows for the possibility of the existence of a plurality of moral communities within a single state. This interpretation has been reprised and developed in various forms by communitarian philosophers to support the idea of a multicultural society and, at the same time, their critique of liberalism. Recognition policies in support of ethnic and cultural minorities should be based on communitarian rights[23] and provide for their environmental protection.[24] Michael Sandel has theorised an even deeper reason in support of the irreplaceable role of communitarian belonging, since the community is the place where it is possible to develop the ideal of authenticity as an expression of such a belonging. The community, in fact, "[…] defines not only what individuals have as fellow citizens, but also what they are, not a relationship they choose (e.g., a voluntary partnership), but a

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[22] See Larmore 1987, 104. Referring to Hegel, Larmore says: "As in the case of Herder, a rejection of autonomy as the paramount personal ideal, together with a commitment to expressivism, led to the abandonment of political neutrality, and the espousal of a substantial communitarianism"; see Appiah 2019, 82; on the principle of political neutrality, see Manti 2015.

[23] See on the topic Kymlicka 1995.

[24] See on this issue Taylor 1994, 61-68.

bond they discover, not a mere attribute, but a constitutive part of their identity" (Sandel 1998, 14). This development of Herder's pluralistic intuition is subject to a wide range of critical stances that are impossible to look at here.[25] I will only emphasise how it implies a monistic view of identity which does not take into consideration that everybody, as Appiah and Sen observed,[26] can be characterised by a plurality of identities and forms of belonging and by the prevalence of one over the other depending on the relevant context. Similar considerations apply to cultures. History itself has shown us how they are far from immobility, changing, hybridising.[27] The environmental protection of cultures thus risks to generate artificial barriers, to become an obstacle to dialogue and cooperation. The way forward is that of a clear distinction between cultural freedom and preservation of cultures. On the other hand, policies aimed at a mere preservation of cultures cause a number of problems of which also Taylor becomes aware when he introduces his *presumptive thesis* that only the cultures which are deemed to have given a framework of meaning to a large number of human beings for a long time have a right to survive. Unfortunately, the assessment criteria for establishing this sort of hierarchy of cultures and what the threshold is beyond which a culture does no longer deserve protection are unclear. Moreover, should a comparative method be adopted, as appears inevitable, it would not be immune from ethnocentrism.[28] Taylor's communitarian synthesis thus reaches the idea that somebody – who? – may decide which culture is worthy of survival and which

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[25] For an in-depth discussion of this, see Manti 2019, 5-9; on the risks of Taylor's politics of recognition, see Appiah 2019, 96-98.

[26] See *ibid.*, 84-86; Sen 2006, 18-36.

[27] It might suffice to think of Hellenism, Christianity, jazz, as well as phenomena more related to material culture, such as clothing and food

[28] A closer look on this topic appears in Manti 2019, 10-13.

is not: an outcome in contrast with his theory of recognition, which requires equal respect for cultures as expressions of a moral community.

The other development of political Romanticism, in Herder's and, above all, Hegel's versions,[29] was the rise of nationalism in history. Here an analysis of the historical genesis of the many theories of nationalism is not possible; suffice it to say that I intend nationalism as an ideology according to which in each national group basic features may be identified distinguishing it from the rest of humanity and being embodied in the nation-state.[30] Today's variant is represented by populist nationalism. Appiah believes it is the outcome of a reaction to globalisation and to the prospect that "The national age was to be edged aside by the 'network age'." (Appiah 2019, 98). In the political imagination of this nationalism not only is the network finite, but ethnic and religious minorities, such as Roma or Muslims, should also not be recognised as equal within the nation for the sake of protection of national identity. Building on this basis, the "[…] populists claim to represent 100 percent of the people, by dismissing their opponents as inauthentic betrayers of the people or else as foreigners, not part of the people at all."[31] This demonstrates that populism is not characterised by anti-politics, but by a hyperpoliticisation leading to what Schmitt considered the essence of 'political' – the friend-enemy relationship (Schmitt 2009, 25-26). This relationship would emerge as the fight of the "pure people" against the corrupted élite within each State,[32] and between different States as the opposition of values and notions of good life characterising them. What typifies

[29] See also Fichte 1978 and 1808.
[30] The first to adopt the term 'nationalism' was the Abbot Barruel, who referred it to the Jacobites. See Barruel 1800, 184.
[31] Cf. Mueller 2016, 3-4. See Appiah 2019, 99.
[32] See Muddle 2014 and 2004. See also Kazin 2017.

populist nationalism is a holistic approach according to which the people is a homogeneous moral community identifying and narrating itself by exclusion. In this connection, what Revelli affirms seems to me to be significant: "Hence each form of populism is more or less deeply connected with the moral construction of the 'other' as an antithesis compared to which the constitutive values of the reference community – taken as *heartland* – are finally disclosed, the borders of which protect the single individualities challenged in their identity and enable them to find collective comfort" (Revelli 2019, 11).

VIII

The 'invention' of nation

If, as Appiah observes, essentialism referred to identities is generally wrong (Appiah 2019, 27) and this also applies to national identity (*ibid.,* xi-xiv) then how is nation to be defined as an alternative to a tradition of thought having its roots in Herder and Hegel and its recent developments in multicultural communitarianism and sovereignist populism? The hypothesis I regard as most reasonable is that the nation is a construct combining cultural and political dimensions. It was Anderson to put an emphasis on how the nation is above all a mental representation constituting a powerful identification object[33] By defining the nation as an imagined political community, he also identified the contents being the subject of imagination: the limits represented by borders, the communion among citizens, sovereignty, the community, since the nation is conceived as a horizontal brotherhood that goes beyond inequalities (Anderson 2003, 6). The nation is a representation created by the interaction

[33] See on the topic Goio 1994, 205.

among institutions and the transmission of information and experiences deriving from the institutional framework containing and regulating them.[34] Hence the state does not produce culture, but contains it.

Anderson's reflections, however, do not look at a fundamental factor in the identification process, since representation is not sufficient for shaping identification. Awareness of belonging to a community endowed with an identity does not imply that such a belonging is normative, in other words, that it provides such reasons on the level of value that they may justify collective actions by the community or performed on its behalf.[35] The nation as representation and value may be identified by referring to 'national behaviour'. Albertini has underlined its essential features. Once national behaviour is defined as the link operated by individuals between their own (cultural, religious, economic, etc.) behaviours and the name of the nation (Albertini 1980, 58) the feature characterising it is 'faithfulness.' Historically, the link between behaviours that are non-national *per se*[36] with the name of the nation and the transfer of faithfulness to it have been made possible by centralisation and territorialisation, which characterised the construction of modern states. I would also emphasise the pivotal role played by bureaucracy in establishing the value of equality before the law and of its non-arbitrariness.[37] All of this caused the above-mentioned behaviours to be politicised.

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[34] Anderson believes communication through the educational system and through the press is fundamental.

[35] See Giddens 1985, vol. 2, 62.

[36] For example, religious or economic behaviours.

[37] See J. Locke 1823, II, XI, § 136, 163 -164. Cf. Larmore 1987, 40-42; Fischer and Lundgreen 1975.

Nation therefore appears as a e collective mental construction that may be traced back to interaction among political and extra-political phenomena. Within the latter, the symbolic dimension is an important factor, which I believe is one of the cornerstones for understanding the phenomenon of integration. We owe to Antony Smith the relevance attributed to such a dimension[38] and its mythical character. Ethnos, intended as an ideal type, would be the *mythomoteur* of the nation. He argues that only through an approach taking into due consideration the symbolic dimension, revolving around a historical comparison of the lasting constitutive elements of ethnic communities and of nations, we may construct an appropriate framework of the historical and sociological relations existing between these communities and nations.[39] Smith's theory is limited in that it considers ethnicity the only interpretative key for everything concerning political identity, so that "[…] the 'ethnic theory' is transformed into a substitute for political theory or of its greatest part […] ethnicity is conveyed to al that has to do with ethnicity for the only reason that it has to do with it." (Goio 1994, 230). Thus ethnicity becomes an ontological reality and ethnic theory an ontology.[40]

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[38] "Of course, there is much more to the concept of the 'nation' than myths and memories. But they constitute a sine qua non: there can be no identity without memory (albeit selective), no collective purpose without myth, and identity and purpose or destiny are necessary elements of the very concept of a nation" (A.D. Smith 2009, "Introduction," 3; on the indefeasibility of *mythomoteur*, see *ibid.*, 24-25.

[39] See *ibid.*; the *mythomoteur* was critically analysed by Altan, who identified five themes that are central to the construction of the ideal type of *ethnos*: the *epos*; the *ethos*, the *logos*, the *genos* and the *topos*. See Altan 1995, 21-32.

[40] Illuminating in this connection is Goio's example: "[…] the English are an ethnic group; the Tudors are English; therefore the Tudor monarchy is an ethnic State, and so is every expression of action concerning it, Shakespeare's tragedies, Dowland's music, etc." (*ibid.*, 230-231).

If nation, as has been said, is an invention and nations are invented and reinvented, a more in-depth analysis of the way the identification process concerning them is generated and characterised should be conducted, also including in this process the cultural dimension, in general, and the symbolic dimension, in particular, without falling into essentialism. The phenomenon we should consider is *integration*, which may be defined as a process characterising the way in which the parts of a system are interconnected.[41] Integration is a process that may be interpreted as mainly cultural or mainly political. The former integration type, for example, is typical of Romantic expressivism, whereby the nation-state expresses its *Volksgeist;* the latter takes the form of a representation of integration modalities. In the former case, there is an objective, ontological conception of nation, in the latter, a configuration modality of reality. If such configuration concerns unification and political exchange, it could be said that political integration happens when rulers and ruled share the same power-justifying belief, so that integration may be defined as a state of congruence and proximity between the political attitudes of rulers and ruled (Stoppino 1982, 141). Congruence indicates the degree to which a given justifying belief is shared (Goio 1994, 240) proximity derives from the content of shared ideas and of political values (Stoppino 1982, 141). The limit of the mainly political interpretation of integration lies in underestimating the function that the generation of the shared feeling which makes it possible to live together productively has in the construction of the nation-state (Appiah 2019, 77) while considering what unites and makes it possible to identify in an 'us' and what divides but may be handled on the basis of such identification, thus keeping social peace and the integrity of the state. This implies the sharing on the part of rulers and ruled of visions of society, of the ways in which

[41] See on the topic Etzioni 1968, 74.

existences are intertwined and relationships are structured, of the expectations and notions and normative images on which such expectations are based; in other words, a social imaginary (Taylor 2004, 23-30) also including the way of conceiving of the production and distribution of resources. Natural law and contractualism, in Grotius's and Locke's versions, gave a fundamental contribution to the construction of the social imaginary in modernity, and traditionally represent the conceptual framework providing the best interpretation of the needs emerging from the Dutch and English realities of their time. Such framework also takes on a wider resonance in which identification appears as the process by which an individual chooses to be a member of a *body politic*, being aware that their role is complementary to the role of others, in line with the values governing society and implying, among other things, political neutrality with regard to controversial notions of good life and fiduciary authorisation to rulers. I believe these two aspects are very relevant to the above-mentioned congruence and proximity, which have not been sufficiently analysed in theories of political integration. The principle of political neutrality originates from acknowledging the real existence of cultures, traditions, their incommensurateness and the function they have in everyday life, and makes it possible to set the limits of tolerance enabling individuals and groups to pursue their own interests and life projects. Fiduciary authorisation to rulers concerned, in modern social imaginary, a regulated management of conflict through explicit and shared rules together with judgement on the exercise of the authorisation that could be revoked. In this respect, the Bill of Rights and the American Declaration of Independence are paradigmatic. In short, the idea of national identity does not require that "we are all the same" (Appiah 2019, 86), but that we share, against the background of a social imaginary, some values making sense of our living together in a state and that it is use and habit that corroborate them.

Social imaginaries may be numerous and may change over time. What they all have in common is being a basis for identification and recognition (as well as denial and misrecognition) both inside a nation and among nations. In the light of what has been said, the nation is a construct in which political and extra-political phenomena are combined. National identity emerges as a lie that bind and may be interpreted as an "operative myth" which has made it possible to respond to the needs of government stability at a time when modernity was being established and developed. For this reason, as Appiah claims, the ideal of national sovereignty still stands as a profound source of legitimacy, however obscure and unstable our definition of people may be (*ibid.*, 90).

Conclusions

The analysis of the processes through which individual and collective identities are construed and of a number of theoretical elaborations characterising Western modernity has led me to the claim that nation is a construct, a mental representation able to incorporate the cultural and political dimensions. I have also emphasised the reasons why I do not deem the holistic conceptions of community and nation inspired by political Romanticism viable, not only under a theoretical perspective, but also because of their potential outcomes. On the one hand, identitarian multiculturalism could be, as Schlesinger thought, a disuniting factor, but precisely with the aim of maintaining national cohesion, it may generate situations such as the *Medusa Syndrome*, in which the state affects what it only claims to recognise, thus becoming too intrusive, at least by the standards of a liberal democracy. This Syndrome, as Appiah observes, is caused by the attempt to fulfil an impossible task, since trying to govern identity

is tantamount to trying to govern the ungovernable (*ibid.*, 97-98)[42] On the other hand, sovereignist populism creates forms of discrimination and marginalisation within states, which may take on extremist forms such as suprematism in the US, and which jeopardise peace and social cohesion. As a matter of fact, separation between "us and them" is extremely problematic, since it is difficult to find an agreement on who we are and reference to a common ancestry, to a monolithic and unchangeable tradition or culture, to *Volksgeist* is no less sustainable today than it was in the nineteenth century (*ibid.*, 82-83).

At the same time, an essentially political-institutional theory of nation considering extra political factors such as cultures and traditions[43] to be marginal does not appear totally convincing, as they are relevant aspects in contributing to the construction of that shared feeling that provides sense (not right, as Burke holds[44]), to the shaping of 'us' as members of a nation.

A reflection on these questions seems to be really topical in the face of the circumstances determined by the Covid 19 emergency. In the first place, the pandemic has gained political relevance and contributed to highlight the weaknesses inherent in the integration of which Western democracies are an expression. As Appiah observes, the tolerant, pluralist, cosmopolitan modernity, which is able to question itself, is certainly under attack.[45] In an often confused, but manifest way, new situations of conflict have emerged. Sovranism has put an emphasis not only on the identity

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[42] According to Appiah, an exemplary case for the Medusa Syndrome is Singapore.

[43] I am using the plural form because in the 'invention' of nation a plurality of cultures and traditions may converge which may be critically reconsidered and hybridised when integration takes place.

[44] See Compagna 1998, 26-36, and Zorza 1970.

[45] See Appiah 2019, 104; see, also, Maffettone 2020, 105-117.

conflict, but also on the conflict between nation state and international institutions or, alternatively, between national citizenship and 'planetary citizenship.' The weakness and contradictoriness of this position is evident if what has happened, for example, in Italy is taken into account. The perception of common vulnerability has generated a communitarian and identity appeal to the 'values of the nation.' In Italy, flying national flags and singing the national anthem have combined with an emphasis on the values of 'Italianness' as a unique capacity to rise up again during times of serious crisis through a strong commitment to solidarity. At the same time, the request of solidarity has been addressed to Europe and other nations in the perception of a common human condition. The first lockdown was the time of greatest consensus between population and government. The identity call was supported by the congruence and proximity between the political attitudes of rulers and ruled. A lack of trust in government action would weaken such call, but it could, also, strengthen it by opposing the people-nation to the rulers.

The identity of a community, of a people, of a nation therefore plays an ambivalent role: if it is considered from an essentialistic point of view, it may be very dangerous and a source of violence (Sen 2006); if it is considered as the outcome of a recognition process, identity, particularly national identity, may be interpreted as an "operative myth", a construct that enabled us to respond to stability and governance needs at a time when Western modernity and nation-states were established, and also to attempt to (partially) answer the question "who are we"? In this context, national identity is an invention or, in Appiah's words, even a lie, the relevance of which, however, cannot be silenced, since it has historically contributed to the integration process, and may be an important factor of social cohesion, as shown during the first lockdown in Italy. Given its pandemic nature, the Covid

emergency, like other major problems of our time,[46] cannot be tackled on a national basis.[47] An urgency therefore emerges for a reworking of our social imaginery of modernity, which also involves a reinvention of nation and its function in an international framework.[48] Since such a complex question cannot be examined here, I will only outline two perspectives which should go hand in hand with each other. The former concerns a reorganisation of democracies focusing on the issues and the needs of an integration capable of combining representative democracy and forms of participatory democracy;[49] the latter concerns the transfer of parts of sovereignty from nation-states to international entities, such as the European Union, requiring a supranational integration process for the first time in history. The difficulties of the EU and other supranational entities playing a more effective political role is explained by the difficulties encountered by such a process. Without it, however attractive it may be, the idea of a bottom-up, polycentric world governance, based on a multi-stakeholder model and made possible by new international representative entities, beside nation-states, including regional organisations, transnational corporations, NGOs, etc.[50], currently appears as utopian. Since integration plays a fundamental role in the creation of a "shared feeling", Appiah is right when, at the end of his *The Lies that Bind*, he expresses the need of establishing an identification based on the recognition of our sense of belonging to humanity. It should be underlined, however, that nowadays this is the recognition of a biological fact, a sort of contemporary *anagnorisis*. The challenge

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[46] By this I mean emergencies such as ecological sustainability, increasing inequality between rich and poor countries, migrations

[47] For a critical analysis of methodological and normative nationalism, see Scuccimarra 2016.

[48] See on the topic Manti 2019, 15-17.

[49] See Manti 2017, 131-156.

[50] See Maffettone 2006, 38-47 and 2020, 119-122.

lies in sharing a *civil ethos* based on the affirmation of a new world conscience revolving around a sympathetic view of the relations among humans and between humans and nature. This perspective, all the more topical in consideration of the pandemic we are experiencing, is accurately summarised by Morin: "For the first time in human history, the universal has become a concrete reality: this is the objective inter-solidarity of humankind, in which the global fate of the planet determines the destinies of individual nations and in which the individual destinies of nations disturb or change the global destiny" (Morin 2004, 204). In short, awareness that the earth is our home country and that the destiny of our species cannot be separated by its position in its environment implies an ethical and political accountability concerning the exploitation of resources, pollution, the model for development to be adopted together with the establishment of the notion of world citizenship.[51] This notion requires the recognition of human rights and the progressive abandonment of a national sense of belonging to reach that of belonging to the human race without this meaning the disappearance of cultural pluralism, which should rather be the basis for the development of intercultural relations. Should the above-mentioned *civil ethos* not be a fundamental aspect of the new social imaginary and, thus, of the integration process it requires, Herder's critique of an abstract and indolent cosmopolitan universalism humiliating the spirit of peoples with its dangerous political implications for the survival and development of liberal democracies will come back into fashion.

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[51] European citizenship can be considered an important step in this sense.

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