THE DANGERS AND INANITY OF (EURO-)NATIONALISM

FROM COMMUNITARIANISM TO COSMOPOLITANISM

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INTRODUCTION

In the current times of multifaceted crisis, nationalism looks, more than ever, like a positive and necessary feeling. It seems both natural and indispensable if we are to have viable political and social institutions that meet the needs and preferences of all citizens.

The following paper contests this vision. Its criticism of nationalism is directed not only at its national forms, but also at any defence of collective identity based on the same model, such as the various forms of European nationalism. Furthermore, the same overriding criticism can be made of different kinds of nationalism, regardless of their more or less open and progressive political content. In order to ground our argument theoretically and practically, we will try to show that nationalism is always potentially harmful to individual rights, and unnecessary for the maintenance of a just social and political system.

We will thus oppose any acritical defence of the intrinsic value of a specific community and the belief in its artificial homogeneity. The historical construction of a supposedly homogeneous community, and the insistence on its values, which are perceived as superior and binding, facilitate the absorption of the individual into the collective. As we will explain further in more details, this holistic approach is typical of communitarian approaches. In that respect, it does not really matter whether they appeal to passion or to reason, to some irrational binding features of the community or to more rational political aspects of a common identity. The main problem in nationalism is not the emotion it can trigger, it is not even its reliance on particular values. What makes nationalism problematic is, firstly, that it tends to overlook the intrinsically divisive and contradictory nature of individual and collective interests in unjust societies; secondly, that it attributes an intrinsic superiority to a particular community over others; and thirdly, that it sees politics as a means to promote the interests, values or identity of that community.

As an alternative, we will very briefly advocate a cosmopolitan approach that grounds political legitimacy in a demanding approach to individual freedom, rather than in a shared collective identity. However, even if only briefly, we will also carefully distinguish our own vision of cosmopolitanism from those commonly put forward. Frequently, cosmopolitan perspectives entangle their identity frameworks with concrete political projects, without clearly explaining how the latter derive from the former. Our approach to cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, is, first and foremost, a critical vision of all communitarian postulates according to which politics should be based on some form of collective identity. Thus, we insist on the conceptual distinction between a general stance on identity issues and the more practical political ideology one stands for. In a subsequent step, we link this cosmopolitan framework with a progressive approach to individual rights. Because of our

demanding approach to individual freedom, our cosmopolitanism goes hand in hand with a revival of identity-free sovereignty. It is therefore distinct from the severe condemnation of sovereignty often found in most mainstream cosmopolitan positions. Finally, instead of the frequent confusion found in public discourses and in the literature between ideals and reality, our position acknowledges the deep gulf separating these two dimensions. It therefore sketches out very general strategic principles to bring normative ideals closer to political reality.

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1. NATIONALISM: A POTENTIALLY HARMFUL DOCTRINE

1.1. A modern construction

It might first of all be useful to recall that nations, national identities and nationalism are the product of a long historical and artificial process of construction. Here we will therefore adopt the "modernist" approach to nationalism, as opposed to the "primordialist" and "ethnosymbolic" ones.

For a long time, the prevailing view on nationalism among scholars was influenced by primordialist premises, according to which nationalism was a natural and universal feature of human societies[2]. On the contrary, modernists stressed the specifically modern and constructed character of nations and nationalism. As for the ethnosymbolists, they were born as a reaction to the modernists and emphasized the role of myths, symbols, memories, values and traditions in the formation, persistence and change of ethnicity and nationalism. They explored the way earlier ethnic communities paved the way for the emergence of nationalism and insisted on the continuities between them[3]. They studied the way "ethnies" came into being and became durable phenomena, by insisting on objective as well as on subjective elements.

Modernists, on the contrary, believe that nations and nationalism are contingent, modern and socially constructed phenomena and that nationalism is explicitly political. For this school of thought, the nationalist doctrine can be defined in the following way: first of all, a nation exists, characterized by an explicit and peculiar character; secondly, the interests and values of this nation have priority over other interests and values; and finally, the nation must be as independent as possible and this requires political sovereignty[4]. For Ernest Gellner, nationalism is a political principle in which the political and the national units should be congruent[5]. Hobsbawm, another renown modernist scholar, described nations and nationalism as being the products of "social engineering". Nations and nationalism would not exist without what he famously labeled "invented traditions"[6]: "a set of ritual or symbolic practices which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition". These invented traditions and their constant repetition imply a strong continuity with the past. But this continuity is artificiallybuilt: history is used as a tool to legitimize political action and as a cement for group cohesion. Particularly during the period between 1870 and 1914 in Europe, building such traditions was the main

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[2]   Pierre L. Van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, Elsevier, New York, 1981.
[3]   Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, Routledge, Abingdon, 1998.
[4]   John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1993 (2d Edition).
[5]   Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2009 (1st Ed. 1983).
[6]   Eric Hobsbauwm, *The Invention of Tradition*, 1983; *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012 (2d Edition).

strategy used by elites to counter the threat of mass democracy by consolidating a common identity. Primary education, public ceremonies and monuments were used to make nationalism a new secular religion. This process also means that it is states and nationalism which have created nations and not the other way around.

According to the modernist analysis, this construction was possible only in the modern period because of its technological and economic evolutions. For instance, a progress such as printing allowed the constitution of national languages, mass literacy and mass schooling. Nationalism offered a double answer to this new context. First, a political answer, as the idea of citizenship allowed a definition of individuals as members of a common polity of citizens; and secondly, a cultural answer: the elites started stressing the common identity of that polity in order to legitimize state action and secure the support of the masses. In other words, nationalism's birth and persistence can be explained by the interests it fulfils. In other words, ethnic and national identities are useful tools for political elites to trigger mass support in the battle for wealth, power and prestige[7]. This instrumental approach highlights the politicization of ethnic and cultural identities to explain their transformation into nationalism. This politicization, as well as the political and economic environment it takes place in, can also explain how cultural differences can be turned into ethnic conflicts. But there is no automaticity in that transformation, which also makes it potentially reversible.

1.2. Fictive homogeneity and superiority

Nations and nationalism are thus social and cultural artifacts. Such a construction tends to hide the numerous social and cultural divides and hybrid mixtures characterizing the collective in question. The nation can be described as "an imagined political community", in which the members do not know one another but share a common image of the nation[8]. "Imagined" does not imply "falsity": although they are mainly cultural and symbolic realities, nations are nonetheless realities. Nationalism conveys the idea that nations are horizontal comradeships, regardless of all the inequalities pervading them. This sense of fraternity is what makes it possible for the members of the nation to die for them.

This fictitious homogeneity is doubly problematic. First, it dissimulates the internal social and, in particular, class-based contradictions within society, thereby preventing dominated social groups from grasping the reality that their interests are fundamentally opposed to those of the dominants, and, in reality, come close to those of the social majorities of other communities. This constructed national

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[7]   Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism, Theory and Comparison*, Sage Publication, London, 1991.
[8]   Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso Books, London 2016 (1st Ed: 1983).

identity constitutes, therefore, a useful tool for the elites to prevent social revolt: instead of fighting for more democracy and a better distribution of the collective wealth, citizens trust "their" rulers, perceived as the incarnation of the general interest of the whole nation[9].

The assumption of a common identity grounded in specific and positive values also facilitates the assertion of a cultural superiority over other collectives. It is all the more dangerous when a national identity is linked to particular political institutions, which is the case in most forms of nationalism. Indeed, as shown by social psychology, valuing a particular identity often goes hand in hand with the devaluing of other communities, and generates a division between apparently cohesive "us" and "them"[10]. Yet the danger is that, once discredited, a group of people can become the subject of all possible exclusions or oppressions. When this group lives within the same territory as the dominant community, it can be symbolically isolated through this process, and be attributed responsibility for many social problems. For example, people of Muslim origin, even when they possess a European citizenship and have been living in Europe since their birth, are perceived as foreign, and as responsible for various problems, such as insecurity or terrorism[11]. Through this process, a discursive homogenization takes place that erases the tensions inside the group concerned: foreign "communities" seem cohesive and harmonious, paralleling the artificial homogeneity of the main cultural group, but they are actually split by similar internal contradictions – social, ethnic or gender-related for instance.

Worse still, this artificial cultural separation overshadows the potential common values or interests transcending cultural communities. Times of social difficulty can consequently be used by populist movements to divert attention from more relevant political issues towards nationalistic or, more broadly, communitarian topics. For instance, "foreigners" will be designated as "those who steal our jobs and profit from our social system". This discourse justifies anti-immigration policies, which, far from solving the real causes of unemployment and decreasing solidarity in welfare,

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[9]   In an interesting passage in his analysis of the Irish question, Karl Marx noted that British nationalism guaranteed to the British bourgeoisie and aristocracy the support of the British working class. It created the idea of a common identity and generated resentment within the popular classes against the Irish proletarians, seen as competitors rather than as objective allies: *"In all the industrial and commercial centers in England the working class is divided in two hostile camps, the Irish and British proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker who he sees as a competitor decreasing his level of wealth. Against the Irish worker, he feels part of the dominant nation and thereby becomes an instrument for the aristocrats and the capitalists against Ireland, strengthening at the same time their domination on himself"*. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Correspondence,* Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, pp. 236-237.

[10] Henri Tajfel, "Social Psychology of Intergoup Relations", *Annual Review of Psychology*, 33, 1982; John C. Turner, "Social Comparison, Similarity, In-goup Favoritism", in Henri Tajfel (Ed.), *Differentiation between Social Groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations* (Academic Press: London, 1978); Maria Sanchez-Manza, "La citoyenneté européenne et l'Autre du dedans", in, Maria Sanchez-Manza and Laurent Licata (Ed.), *L'Autre. Regards psychosociaux*, Presses universitaires de Grenoble, Grenoble, 2005.

[11] See for ex. The Annual Report 2014 of the *Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en France*: http://www.islamophobie.net/sites/default/files/CCIF-Annual-Report-2014.pdf.

permit, on the contrary, the maintenance of a "reserve army" of illegal immigrants, exerting a downwards pressure on the wages of low skilled labor. More importantly, this discourse hides the important proximity of interests in a legal job, a better salary, and better access for all to social benefits that is shared by workers and citizens from all origins. The valuing of national identity can also lead to the devaluing of external communities. As a result, nationalist discourses are often accompanied by the construction of outside enemies, usually regardless of any objective threat. When it is used to justify wars, nationalism then takes on its most anti-humanistic and anti-liberal visage: it manages to convince the members of the "national community" to give their blood for it[12]. Nationalism can also justify policies privileging "our" interest over that of other populations. Economic and political elites will for instance defend "our" enterprises' competitiveness against those of other countries, either in Europe or in the world. Such rhetoric is not only particularistic, but also obscures the reality: in many fields, the race for greater competitiveness pits workers all over the world against each other rather than pitting nations against each other. Let us note that this competition is particularly fierce within the eurozone and that the (short term) winners of this economic battle are usually transnational corporations rather than particular nations. Indeed, the emphasis on national competitiveness is misleading. Contrary to the illusion that it promotes common national interests, it actually enables a great deal of social regressions: boosting competitiveness often means reducing the cost of labour and increasing its flexibility, as well as lowering taxes on capital income and benefits[13].

1.3.   Similar dangers at the European level

Euronationalism would pose the same dangers as the classical forms of nationalism. Even explicitly democratic and progressive forms of "constitutional patriotism" (CP), such as that promoted by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas for a long time, present many similarities with national forms of nationalism, despite their conscious effort to go beyond it[14]. To be sure, CP aims to tame national identities, by highlighting their very particularistic and harmful effects on individual liberties, and also by insisting on a constant and critical evaluation of each national history according to universalistic criteria of human rights and democracy. CP is presented by its supporters as a new form of belonging grounded in attachment to universal principles, human rights and democracy, rather than in particular cultural values, as

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[12]   George Kateb, "Is Patriotism a mistake?", *Social Research*, 67 (4), Winter 2000, pp. 906-907.
[13]   Tax competition is particularly important within the eurozone and has a differential impact on small and big countries: Inga Rademacher, "Tax competition within the Eurozone: Capital mobility, Agglomeration, Compensation and the Small Country Disadvantage", MPIfG Discussion Paper 13, 2013, http://www.mpi-fg-koeln.mpg.de/pu/mpifg_dp/dp13-13.pdf.
[14]   Justine Lacroix, "Europe et libéralisme politique. Sens d'un postnationalisme 'radical'", *Politique Européenne*, September 2006, 19, pp. 30-31; Sophie Heine, "Jürgen Habermas et le patriotisme constitu-tionnel", *Politique, Revue de débat*, September-October 2011, N°71.

well as on a reflexive perception of history[15]. Nonetheless, the same mechanisms as those prevailing in traditional forms of nationalism are at play in this supposedly distinct form of belonging. Both approaches rely on the conviction that a specific community exists – in the case of CP, the European community – and that it contains positive and historically-anchored values different from other communities. These values are not only positive, but also discrete, and, moreover, superior to those of other cultural entities. This is illustrated by a profound pride in the supposed historic achievements of the moral community of reference, and by the desire to defend its interests internationally[16]. Despite an explicit will to break with nationalism, the defenders of European CP insist, in the same way as do traditional nationalists, on an emotional collective identity as a precondition for the functioning of any political entity[17]. The insistence on a common identity grounded in particular values and a specific history is also very present in these arguments[18]. The same dangers as those identified before for nationalism can thus also be associated to euronationalism.

Consequently, the real conceptual tension in the debate on the reconfiguration of national identity does not actually oppose anti-European "nationalists" and pro-European "post-nationalists". Rather, the real disagreement seems to be between those who agree that there must be a congruence between the legal community and the moral (or cultural) community in order for there to be a politically viable entity and those who want to detach the distinctive identities from legal and political institutions, arguing that they should be based on universal principles rather than on specific values.

In political debates on Europe too, most contenders share broadly communitarian premises without even being aware of it. Thus, the majority of eurosceptics do not oppose the current EU only for social, political or strategic reasons. Most of them also promote a particular vision of identity which is at odds with the European idea: they often share the postulate according to which just institutions need a common identity, in this case, a national one. This communitarian framework is most obvious in right-wing eurosceptic discourses which have a clear identity basis and see nationalism as their defining doctrine. The picture is a bit more complex in the case of left-wing eurosceptic discourses: here, the main ideologies are critical of the excessive economic liberalism characterizing the EU as well as its "democratic deficit". Such a criticism is shared by various tendencies within the left, from the most radical to the most moderate ones. The difference between them is their degree of radicalism and

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[15] Jürgen Habermas, *L'intégration républicaine,* Fayard, Paris, 1998, pp. 177-179 et p. 12-13; Jürgen Habermas, *The postnational Constellation: Political Essays,* MIT Press Edition, Cambridge, Massachussets, 2001).

[16] See in particular: Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, "Europe: plaidoyer pour une politique extérieure commune", *Libération*, 31May – 1st June 2003.

[17] Jürgen Habermas, *Zur Verfassung Europas: Ein Essay*, Surhkamp, Berlin, 2014, p. 90.

[18] On this, see also Philippe Juvin, *Notre Histoire, Les cent dates qui ont fait la nation européenne,* J.C. Lattès, Paris, 2014.

the strategic conclusions they draw. The radical left seems to consider that projects trying to redirect the EU in a more social and democratic direction are doomed. Let us note that there was certainly more optimism in earlier periods. For instance, the left opposed to the European Constitutional Treaty combined a radical criticism of the current EU with a project for an alternative – more social and democratic – Europe[19]. This does not mean that the eurosceptic left was deprived of national sentiment but that it could complement it with an explicitly "alter-European" vision. The return to a more national strategy by the critical left in most Western European countries can be explained by the relative disenchantment now prevailing in those circles. The recent treaties and policy orientations have indeed not weakened the economic liberalism and oligarchic tendencies characterizing the EU at least since the 1980s. Patriotic or nationalist tendencies can then find some room for expression, even within left-wing forms of euroscepticism, thereby confirming an old tradition on the left. Indeed, in the course of the twentieth entury, the European reformist left has ended up associating the welfare state and democratic sovereignty with national identity. This current national orientation was recently confirmed by the alliance formed between the radical left Syriza and the right-wing sovereignist "Independent Greeks" in Greece[20].

At the other end of the polemic, "federalist" movements often share a similar view on the link between politics and identity: their arguments in favour of a deeper European integration usually mix social, economic and political reasons with identity-related ones. One often hears from them, not only that a common European identity is indispensable to reach better "output" and "input" legitimacy[21] of the EU, but also that the latter will increase the former. There is therefore a circular reinforcement of the political and identity dimension: a common European identity will secure a common political integration (in the broad sense and therefore also including social and economic aspects) and this political integration will strengthen the common identity. One therefore gets slightly consufed about the real objective: a common identity or more political integration? In any case, the thought and discursive processes are very similar in most eurosceptic and federalist approaches, at least concerning the links established between politics and identity. They might differ on the level at which they aim to rehabilite sovereignty (national or European) but they often share a similar approach to the links between identity and politics. As I will argue further, the real contrast is between communitarian views, in the broad sense,

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[19] Sophie Heine, *Europhobic or Eurocritical? Opposition to the European Union in the French and German Left*, LAP, 2010.

[20] Sophie Heine, "Syriza's call for sovereignty: Hopes and Illusions", Egmont, Commentary, http://www.egmontinstitute.be/publication_article/syrizas-call-for-sovereignty-hopes-and-illusions/, 29-01-2015.

[21] "Input" legitimacy refers to the more or less democratic dimension of the decision-making process, while "output" legitimacy refers to the policies delivered by the institutions: Fritz Scharpf, "Problem-Solving Effectiveness and Democratic Accountability in the EU", MPIfG Working Paper 03/1, February 2003.

and cosmopolitan approaches – the former encompassing at once nationalists and euro-nationalists[22].

1.4.   "Good" *versus* "bad" nationalism?

Many supporters of a progressive version of nationalism – in this case, often labeled as "patriotism" – argue that if nationalism can be pernicious because of its narrow and exclusive cultural values, it is worth embracing a "good" version of it, grounded in universal and political principles. This distinction between a good form of patriotism and a more dangerous nationalism is, however, deceptive. In practice, they usually come very close to one another. It is certainly true that they can differ in their intensity and in the policies associated with them. In that respect, it might be useful to recall that nationalism is a general doctrine supposing a particular relation-ship to national identity rather than a fully-fledged political ideology. In concrete political discourses, it is usually associated with particular political ideologies, such as liberalism, conservatism or socialism[23]. To take just a few examples, the patriotic approach put forward by the left-wing party Syriza is tied to very left-wing social policies. In a similar vein, there is a case for approaching differently the nationalistic reactions of certain populations which have undergone economic, social and cultural domination. For some modernist authors, nationalism has to be located in the "uneven development" of history: nationalism developed in poor countries on the "periphery" as a reaction against external domination and invasion by more powerful countries[24]. In that context, nationalism allowed the construction of an inter-class community which was strongly aware of its own separate identity vis-à-vis the external forces of domination. However, even explicitly progressive or more morally justified forms of nationalism can culminate in the same drift towards narrower and more exclusivist approaches. The fact that the seeds of progress and regress can be found in all types of nationalism makes it an inherently ambiguous phenomenon possibly leading to diverse and conflicting political or moral conse-quences. Therefore, even if it could somehow make sense to distinguish a dominant nationalism and a dominated one[25], as well as one fed by a social minority and linked to conservative policies and another one enjoying a broader social legitimacy and

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[22]   For a detailed explanation of these different philosophical schools, see: Sophie Heine, "National vs postna-tional ou communautarisme vs cosmopolitisme? Une confrontation des différentes approches théoriques sur l'identité", in John-Erik Fossum, Paul Magnette, Johanne Poirier, *Ces liens qui unissent: accommoder la diversité en Europe et au Canada / Ties that Bind: Accomodating Diversity in Europe and Canada,* Peter Lang, Bruxelles, 2009; See also the second chapter of Sophie Heine*, Pour un individualisme de gauche*, Ed. Lattès, Paris, 2013.

[23]   Michael Freeden, "Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology?", *Political Studies*, 1998.

[24]   Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism,* Common Ground, Champaign, 2003 (1st Ed: 1981).

[25]   Michael Löwy, *Patrie ou planète. Nationalismes et internationalismes de Marx à nos jours Page Deux,* Laus-anne, 1997, p. 57.

promoting emancipatory objectives, this should not allow us to support nationalism in principle.

Furthermore, nationalistic movements very rarely claim values that sound dangerous or harmful to individual freedoms *per se*. Most of them, in fact, mobilize values and principles that sound *a priori* progressive. Yet, even so, they can easily lead to the crushing of individual liberties, and sometimes to very bellicose and bloody consequences. There are numerous examples of military aggressions that were justified by the idea that the nation was at the forefront of a battle to promote positive and universal ideals. For instance, the imperialistic nationalisms of the nineteenth century justified their colonial conquests in the name of the extension of civilization against barbarism, a project presented as entailing progress for all mankind. The official account of colonization did not talk in terms of serving the interests of the European elites, or those of the colonizing countries, as though they represented a sort of class alliance against the rest of the world. Rather, colonialism was above all supposed to enlighten the indigenous by passing on to them the values of reason and progress[26]. In the twentieth century, the Vietnam War was legitimized by the United States not only by the imperatives of the Cold War struggle against the communist bloc, but also by the defence of the values carried by the "patria" which were presented as universal, such as freedom and democracy. And one could easily find similar examples in contemporary debates.

In reality, the danger inherent in nationalism lies less in the values upon which it rests than in the postulate that identification with common values is an absolute necessity for politics. Nationalism creates an artificial – and often mainly rhetorical – cultural homogeneity and valorization of one particular community over others and states that this collective must have a political outlet. This insistence on a particular collective identity facilitates the preservation of existing social dominations and the creation of new ones by constructing the notion of "others" inside and outside the political entity. The historic fate of most nationalist movements should reinforce this suspicion. Even when they are apparently progressive, they have generated numerous drifts, often contradictory of their purported ideals. For example, during the Fordist-Keynesian period, which was quite favourable to the working and middle classes, nationalism was a way of justifying both a disinterest in the rest of the world and some forms of neo-colonialism. We can also take as examples the nationalist movements of decolonization inspired by socialist ideas that went on to facilitate the instrumentation of the newly created identity by a small elite, who established their own hierarchies. The dictatorships put in place after independence in many African countries, for example, were made possible not only by the support of the great powers, but also because their nationalistic rhetoric granted them a certain basic

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[26] On the current legacy of colonial memories, see the very thorough book: Kalypso Nicolaïdis, Berny Sèbe and Gabrielle Maas (Ed.), *Echoes of Empire: Memory, Identity and the Legacy of Imperialism*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2014.

legitimacy. In the 1990s, various governments founded on progressive bases and instituting real improvements in the fight against poverty and inequality, such as left-wing regimes in Latin America, nonetheless employed strongly nationalist rhetoric in order both to get popular support and also to concentrate power in the ruling elite and limit internal opposition.

Beside the fact that, in its principle and by the actions it facilitates, nationalism can reveal itself to be contradictory to progressive and universalistic ideals, our next argument is that it is not necessary to ensure either democracy or social justice.

2. NATIONALISM IS NOT NECESSARY

2.1. A latent cosmopolitan spirit

For many progressive nationalists (or euronationalists), a common identity is not only good *per se*, but also necessary for the maintenance or revival of social justice and democracy. The argument goes as follows: a sense of belonging to a community is essential to give rise to civic mobilization, mutual trust and respect for majority decisions, allowing the functioning of democracy[27]. A strong identity substratum is also indispensable in order to ensure solidarity, which is allegedly the basis of social justice[28]. More generally, a common identity is seen as the only way of creating an interest and attachment beyond close family and community circles. It would supposedly be necessary to pass through particular community affiliations to develop universalist attitudes: first the most immediate surroundings, then the local community, then the nation, and only finally the rest of humanity[29]. Such arguments are present in nationalist as well as euronationalist positions[30]. The position often runs in opposition to the philosophically liberal tenet according to which there is no need to have common ethical or moral references to build a functioning society: in this perspective, human beings can have access to the universal only after experiencing primary modes of socializations in the family, the local community or the nation, purportedly necessary to foster human virtues such as solidarity, benevolence, generosity or loyalty[31].

This postulate – the necessity of an identity substratum to sustain democracy and social justice – can be contested in numerous ways. First of all, it is possible to question the idea that individuals and groups support a political and social system or progressive principles only when they feel connected to one another by common values. Plenty of examples attest to the capacity of individuals to give support to and even actively defend complete strangers or people living in very remote places as well as to social or political movements without any shared identity.

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[27] One of the best theorizations of this argument remains that made by David Miller in *On Nationality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1995.

[28] One of the first thinkers to use this argument was Theodor H. Marshall: "Citizenship and social class", in T. H. Marshall T.H. and T. Bottomore (Eds), *Citizenship and social class*, London, Pluto Press, London, 1992-1950, p. 8. See also contemporary philosophers like: Paul Thibaud, "L'Europe par les nations (et réciproquement)", in Jean-Mars Ferry et Paul Thibaud, *Discussions sur l'Europe,* Calmann-Levy, Paris, 1992, p. 61-62; Charles Taylor, "Why Democracy Needs Patriotism", in Martha C. Nussbaum (Ed.), *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1996, pp. 119-121.

[29] Benjamin R. Barber, "Fe constitucional", in Marta C. Nussbaum, *Los limites del patriotismo* (Barcelona: Paido, 1996), p. 47; Jacques Généreux, *La Grande Régression*, Seuil, Paris, 2010, op. cit., p. 206-223.

[30] See for instance: Jürgen Habermas, „Warum braucht Europa eine Verfassung?", Discourse at the University of Hamburg (*Die Zeit*, 27/2001, p. 6; Cécile Laborde, "From Constitutional to Civic Patriotism", *British Journal of Political Science*, 32, 2002, p. 591.

[31] Jean-Claude Michéa, *La double pensée: retour sur la question libérale,* Flammarion, Paris, 2008, p. 229-230.

Put differently: manifestations of a "cosmopolitan spirit" are abundant in modern history. Let us just recall the support given by a big part of the European left to the republican side during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 through the "international brigades", the resistance to the Jewish extermination during the Second World War by people who had absolutely no obligation to risk their lives for such a cause, the various movements supporting the revolutionary struggles in Cuba, Bolivia or Chile, or the decolonization struggles. Illustrations of a cosmopolitan spirit can also be found in less radical movements, and even among ordinary citizens of all political affiliations. Whatever the normative judgment expressed about them, several forms of militancy meeting with a generally positive response among the broader population bear witness to this latent spirit, such as: the birth at the end of the 1990s of a "movement for a just globalization" (or the "alter-globalization" movement), organized in world and regional "social forums" and militating for a more humane and democratic globalization; worldwide demonstrations against economic institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund; the most recent movement of the "Indignés" or the "Occupy Wall Street" movement, explicitly global in their action and approach; or in a more moderate perspective, the involvement of ordinary citizens in NGO's or charities helping to alleviate the consequences of natural disasters, wars or economic catastrophes.

2.2.   Universally shared principles

These few examples demonstrate that human beings can easily commit to social or political action without sharing the same history, language or culture.

One possible explanation lies in the universal capacity to feel empathy for other human beings in general. Children are often taught to love their immediate circle first, followed by their local community and nation, which are often presented as an enlarged "family". But young children do not build ethno-cultural categories as easily as adults do. They feel sorrow or compassion when confronted with others' suffering, regardless of their cultural proximity[32]. The limitation of the capacity to show empathy seems less innate than socially and culturally learnt. Recent studies in cognitive psychology confirm this cosmopolitan intuition, showing that the origin of empathic tendencies and the faculty to adopt universalist behaviors are ingrained in human nature, and appear at an early age in all societies[33].

A whole field within socio-biology confirms this, showing that empathy and even altruism must have deep biological roots linked to the necessities of evolution and of the survival of the group[34]. This faculty of empathy towards other human beings, for

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[32]   Nussbaum, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
[33]   Martin L. Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.
[34]   Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Black Swan, 2006), p 241-267.

the simple reason that they share the same humanity, as well as the capacity to commit oneself to causes involving people from very different cultures is confirmed by the presence of basic universal values in most cultures. Everywhere in the world, struggles are fought by virtue of principles that can be considered universal, even if they are not always defined in the same terms. And indeed, the argument that human rights are exclusively Western is most often brandished by those who trample on these rights, rather than by their defenders. More precisely, all human beings in all cultural settings seem able to adhere to the principle that human dignity is a supreme value independent of cultural peculiarities. For instance, Rawls' theory of justice[35], which informs a large part of current Western thought, articulates this by saying that principles of justice must be shared by all particular conceptions of the good. By the same token, the Rawlsian metaphor of "the veil of ignorance" aims to symbolically account for the elaboration of these principles independently of particular cultural or ethical conceptions.

This universalistic approach can be found in numerous other moral or religious doctrines which consider that human dignity should be the end of individual and collective activity. Thus, the Kantian principles, which recommend treating others always as an end in themselves and never only as a means, and also to think collectively by putting oneself in others' shoes, can be found in several other doctrines[36]. Thus, a similar idea can be found in the fundamental Christian doctrine that we should take notice of our fellow beings' common humanity rather than their particular belongings[37]. Other religions also advocate the common dignity of all human beings[38]. All these principles convey the idea that mere belonging to human community suffices to justify an equal value for all humans[39]. Highlighting these universal principles does not entail giving support to the particular doctrines within which they are inscribed, and even less to the acts committed in their names – which are often antagonistic to these official axioms. We bring to the fore these anthropological and historical arguments only to show that the same humanist and universalist inspiration can be found in the world's most dominant cultural traditions. This also allows us to understand the cosmopolitan behaviour and aspirations that have always been taking place everywhere and in all eras.

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[35] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Belknap Press, Cambridge MA, 2005 (1st Ed 1971).

[36] Emmanuel Kant, *Fondements de la métaphysique des mœurs,* Edition Hatier, Paris, 2000 (1st Ed.1785), Version électronique:http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/kant_emmanuel/fondements_meta_moeurs/ fondem_meta_moeurs.doc, p. 40.

[37] Alain Badiou highlighted this universalism within the thinking of one of the main founders of the Catholic church, namely, Saint Paul: Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: La Fondation de L'universalisme,* PUF, Paris, 1998, p. 80. This universalism appears among others in the famous sentence from Saint Paul in his speech to the Galatians (Ga, 3/28): "there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free man, man or woman".

[38] Hadith 2.6.1 in the Sahîh d'Al-Bukharî (810-870), Sunna (Words of the Prophet); Jérôme Ducor, "L'amour et la compassion dans le bouddhisme" in "En dialogue sur la voie du Bouddha", *Bulletin du Centre protestant d'étude*s, 46th year, No 2, 1994.

[39] Carriona McKinnon, "Cosmopolitan Hope", in Gillian Brock and Harry Brighouse, *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism,* Cambridge University press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 245-246.

2.3.   Interests, ideologies and mobilizations

There is, however, a problem with the typical cosmopolitan argument put forward above: action in favour of a particular political project or system does not merely derive from empathic or altruistic tendencies. The idea that political action should be related to morality – itself based on altruistic orientations – is shared by most cosmopolitans[40] and nationalists alike. But if this is the case, then nationalists might have a point: it is indeed easier to show altruistic tendencies within a smaller circle or community. And the nation is often presented by them as an enlarged family. On the other hand, as they often contend, it might be purely utopian to extend such inclinations to the supra-national or European level.

Nonetheless, it might be worth questioning the vision of social change that is prevalent in these debates. Historical progress requires more than common values or a shared identity: human beings act at the collective level out of selfish motives as much as altruistic ones[41]. Preaching progressive and persuasive values is therefore as insufficient for the purpose of implementing greater social justice and democracy as is the communitarian insistence on a common identity. First and foremost, social change requires interest-based mobilizations and political struggles, so as to force, and not just convince, those who have a deep-seated interest in protecting the *status quo*. Yet, if progressive institutions ensue mostly from social and political conflicts, the argument that a just system is possible only if its members share a common identity or common values becomes invalid.

Certainly, as advocated above, these struggles require a common ideology resting on mobilizing principles and those should probably be universal. But within this ideological dimension, it is necessary to give primacy to rational and cognitive aspects over axiological or values-related ones. Indeed, as argued before, grounding political institutions on identification to national values generates several dangers for individual freedom. Thus, if progressive principles are an essential part of any emancipatory ideology, they should consist principally in a call to the individual interests that compose the majority of dominated people. This does not exclude an appeal to both negative and positive emotions. Most popular ideologies rely on anger, resentment or indignation about current injustices as well as on the hopes and dreams for a better, more just, future. By mobilizing individuals, a progressive ideology can contribute to creating the necessary balance of power for establishing and maintaining just institutions.

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[40]   See for instance: Kwame A. Appiah, "Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers", Northon and Company, 2007 or David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities*, Polity Press, London, 2010. Even if Held acknowledges the importance of general structural context on political agency, he sills insist greatly on the moral and cultural aspects enabling cosmopolitan progress.

[41]   Sophie Heine, *"*Social Change in Progressive Thought: Analysis and Propositions», *Journal of Political Ideologies,* Vol 7 (3), Oct 2012; Sophie Heine *Pour un individualisme de gauche*, J.C. Lattès, Paris, 2013.

The argument that historical progress results less from a shared identity or common values than from strong mobilizations – themselves encouraged by particular ideologies articulating the interests of the majorities – forcefully belies a moral form of cosmopolitanism as well as some of the instrumental arguments in favour of nationalism. Furthermore, the view that maintains that nationalism is necessary in order for there to be a viable democratic and just polity can be invalidated by empirical and historical analysis.

Indeed, the development of democracy in Europe and the emergence of welfare systems based on redistribution and socialization of a part of the economy are the product of a combination of important social and political movements and a a context where the balance of power was relatively favourable to progressive forces. National identity may have helped consolidate these systems, but it was rarely at their roots.

The institutionalization of social security and public services after the Second World War in Western Europe cannot be explained predominantly by a surge of national solidarity from the upper-classes towards the less well-off. Such a feeling was certainly present after the butchery that had slaughtered millions of human beings, but it is difficult to sustain the claim that it was the determining factor explaining these advances. They were, rather, the result of numerous social actions that began at the end of the nineteenth century – trade unions organization, mutual assistance, cooperatives, strikes, demonstrations, destruction of industrial tools, etc – and of the activism of various political forces[42]. To these elements we must add the Cold War context: the strengthening of the communist bloc, which had been endowed with a clear legitimacy following its determining role in the victory against the fascist states, and which was able to rely on many armed cells among the Western Resistance members, exerted an indirect pressure on the elites of the West to go further in the establishment of a more just socio-economic system. Similarly, it would be naive to maintain that parliamentary democracy was the spontaneous consequence of national identity, since in many countries its establishment required violent revolutions and very long and intense political activism. The example of French history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and its successive revolutionary and counter-revolutionary jolts, perfectly illustrates the preponderance of social and political struggles in the advent of representative democracy.

Therefore, if the philosopher Jürgen Habermas is right to state that democratic citizenship and national identity are not conceptually and necessarily linked, he may well be wrong when he affirms that the two concepts have a strong historical and empirical bond, especially if this link is defined as a causal relation. For him, a common national feeling was one of the elements facilitating the emergence of

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[42] Guy Vantemsche, *La sécurité sociale: les origines du système belge. Le présent face à son passé,* De Boeck, 1994, p. 13-14.

democratic citizenship, and the latter has subsequently consolidated the feeling of belonging to the same collective[43]. There is no doubt that this historical bond has existed one way or another but we do have to reflect on its nature. Even if the formation of national identity and the building of democratic citizenship were parallel processes that came together and had perhaps mutually reinforcing effects, this does not mean that the first phenomenon was the reason for the second, since correlation and causality are two different things. Similar reasoning can be outlined even more convincingly for redistributive systems, which were often consolidated in states where a strong national identity was already present.

An additional argument against the alleged causal relationship between these two elements – social and democratic citizenship on the one hand and nationalism on the other – is provided by the existence of multinational states characterized by a certain level of democracy and social justice. In the same vein, despite a very frequent postulate, no empirical proof is available to back up the idea that the growing multiculturalism of Western states has caused the weakening of their democratic and social institutions[44]. Even if this deterioration seems to be an acknowledged fact, it is more likely to be explained by economic and political than cultural factors – among others: the victory of neoliberal economics, the extension of global competition, European deregulations, the fading of labour resistance – and by their impact on the balance of power between various social and political actors.

In other words, nationalism does not seem to be a precondition for a just or democratic system. This should move us to sketch a vision of progressive politics that goes beyond the national framework. Democratic and social institutions and collective identity are not intrinsically bound and should be disentangled. Far from being the natural evolution of a shared national identity, these institutions are the product of social and political struggles. Consequently, their transposition and furthering at another level than the national one is perfectly feasible to envisage, as long as adequate mobilizations can be fostered to this end. As we argued before, this requires a convincing and mobilizing ideology showing the link between politics at a supranational level and the individual interests of a majority of citizens.

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[43]   Jürgen Habernas, "Citoyenneté et identité nationale. Réflexions sur l'avenir de l'Europe", in J. Lenoble and N. Dewandre, *L'Europe au soir du siècle. Identité et démocratie,* Esprit, Paris, 1992, p. 22.

[44]   Kies G. Banting, "Le contre-exemple canadien: multiculturalisme, reconnaissance et redistribution", in Fossum, Magnette, Poirier, *op. cit.*, p. 335 et p. 340.

3. TOWARDS A PROGRESSIVE APPROACH TO COSMOPOLITANISM

Criticizing all forms of nationalism for being undesirable and unnecessary and promoting a cosmopolitan stance does not reveal much about the political and social institutions that should be supported within the philosophical framework being advocated. As a matter of fact, cosmopolitanism – like nationalism – is compatible with very different political projects. It is therefore necessary to clarify our particular normative approach to cosmopolitanism. We will do so only briefly here since this is a subject we tackle in other publications[45].

First of all, the cosmopolitanism promoted here intends to avoid confusion between desire and reality. The literature on the subject very often and problematically mixes descriptive and prescriptive dimensions: instead of only elaborating a normative project and using it as a yardstick to assess contemporary reality, most authors also tend to indulge in wishful thinking. Carried away by their enthusiasm for cosmopolitan ideas, they often mistake any weakening of the nation for a sign of the coming ascendency of these ideas, and fail to objectively evaluate the gap that still prevails between their ideals and reality[46]. In the end, this concern touches upon the strategic issue of how to change reality. The cosmopolitanism we advocate makes a clear distinction between reality and the ideal for which it stands. And it contends that the only way of changing the latter is by combining the promotion of ideas with social and political struggles.

Besides, our cosmopolitan framework goes hand in hand with a particular ideological and political stance. A lot of cosmopolitan writings also mix a stand on identity with particular political projects and ideologies, but without making this connection explicit[47]. On the contrary, the vision defended here clearly claims to be a progressive one, and is therefore very demanding in terms of democratic and social changes. In order to put it in place, sovereignty should not be weakened, as many cosmopolitan approaches demand[48], but rather rescued and even strengthened. It is, indeed, impossible to put in place a lively democracy or combat social inequalities without an effective popular sovereignty capable of imposing stringent rules on powerful

[45]   Among others, see the second chapter of Heine, 2013, op. cit.

[46]   Held, *op. cit.*, p. 26-27; Archibugi, *op. cit.;* Seyla Benhabib, *Another cosmopolitanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)*,* p. 171-174.

[47]   Held, *op. cit.*, 2010; Daniel Archibugi, *The global Commonwealth of Citizens: towards Cosmopolitan Democracy,* Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2008; Jean-Marc Ferry, *Europe, la voie kantienne. Essai sur l'identité postnationale*, Cerf, Paris, 2005, p. 121-124; Jürgen Habermas, *La Paix perpétuelle. Bicentenaire d'une idée kantienne*, Cerf, Paris, 2000), p. 51-52; Jürgen Habermas, *Après l'Etat-nation. Une nouvelle constellation politique*, Fayard, Paris, 2000; Thomas Pogge, "A cosmopolitan perspective on the global economic order", in Brock and Brighouse, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-102, pp. 105-106.

[48]   See for example: David Held, "Principles of cosmopolitan order", in Gillian Brock and Harry Brighouse, *op. cit.*; p. 26-27; Kateb, *op. cit.*, p. 921-922.

economic actors, or even of radically transforming the economic system. Sovereignty is indispensable to any progressive project, and must, therefore, not be renounced in the name of cosmopolitanism. One of the flaws in intellectual and political cosmopolitanism is actually its tendency to confuse different dimensions that should in reality be clearly distinguished. More precisely, it seems to rely on an acritical appraisal of the basic tenets of liberalism, seen as an undifferentiated doctrine including not only political and philosophical aspects but also economic ones[49]. This also leads cosmopolitans to be critical of sovereignty, seen as almost always linked with nationalism and the risk of power abuse. For mainstream cosmopolitanism, sovereignty has to be tamed in all its aspects, because if its close association with nationalism or concentration of power, and liberalism has to be defended in all its dimensions.

Nonetheless, the truth is that one can contemplate a strong public sovereignty going hand in hand with a cosmopolitan philosophical framework; that is to say, exempt from any insistence on a specific collective identity. The cosmopolitan vision promoted here stresses primarily the necessity to ground the legitimacy of the polity in its democratic and socially just features, and ultimately in its ability to meet the individual interests of the citizens, rather than in a specific identity. This does not signify that identities need to be abolished, but simply that they belong to another sphere than the political – namely, to private life, or civil society. This is perfectly compatible with an interpretation of political and philosophical liberalism that gives priority to the fulfillment of effective individual freedom.

Finally, we want to avoid a further common mistake in the literature on cosmopolitanism, namely, its automatic association with particular – usually global – levels at which sovereignty should be organized[50]. Many pleas for cosmopolitanism consider that all transfers of power beyond national authorities are almost necessarily a good thing, thereby confusing the identity framework and the institutional level of the organization of power. Yet, even if one might wish that sovereignty be organized at a world level in order to apply the cosmopolitan requirement of universal individual rights, it is imperative to take into account the concrete possibilities available in our current reality. Economic regionalization is more advanced than economic globalization, particularly in what concerns trade[51]. Besides, political institutions and even political consciousness are increasingly a European reality. It is, therefore, more realistic to elaborate political projects at the European level than worldwide. By directly jumping on to the world stage and welcoming any transfer of sovereignty to this level, many cosmopolitan positions run the risk of actually justifying and bolstering existing relations of power. Indeed, global evolutions tend to privilege the

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[49]   Yet, both in practice and in theory, these dimensions can be distinguished: See the first chapter of Sophie Heine, *Oser penser à gauche. Pour un réformisme radical*, Aden, Bruxelles, 2010.
[50]   Held, *op. cit.,* 2010.
[51]   "Intra-euro Area Trade Linkages and External Adjustments", *ECB Monthly Bulletin*, January 2013.

interests of big economic actors rather than those of ordinary citizens. Many international treaties and institutions tend to reduce democratic sovereignty and to give more power to private actors by strengthening the freedoms of capital, goods and services. The solution to this should not be, however, to discard any cosmopolitan view and to fall back on the nation state, but instead to rescue sovereignty at the European levels and to dissociate it from any europatriotic feelings for the reasons already explained. Even though we do not have sufficient space to explore them here, it is worth mentioning that such a perspective would have very concrete implications for internal as well as external European policies.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented a strong criticism of nationalism.

First, we highlighted the fact that the promotion of the intrinsic value of a specific community carries numerous dangers, particularly when it is done in connection with political action. The symbolic construction of a purportedly homogeneous community, and insistence on its values, which are presented as superior and as a deep bond for the members of the community, can easily provoke the absorption of the individual into the collective. The historical construction of an artificially harmonious community glosses over the internal conflicts within society, obscuring thereby the common interests of the dominated parts of the population and their opposition to those of the more privileged sectors. This process also makes it easier to affirm the cultural superiority of the community of reference compared to other entities. This leads to the construction of "others", who can easily be exploited, oppressed or excluded. The internal "others" can then be so presented in populist discourses in a fashion that diverts attention from real political and social topics towards more identity-based issues. The "others" can also be external: the devaluing of cultural (often national) entities on the international stage can justify oppression, wars, conquests or non-cooperative economic strategies. To sum up, through the building and over-valuing of a symbolic and, for the most part, artificial cultural homogeneity nationalism permits the maintenance of existing dominations and the development of new ones.

These potential dangers can arise even in cases of nationalisms associated with progressive political projects. Indeed, the dangers and biases intrinsic to nationalism lies less in the values that it officially defends than in its assertion that identification with common values is an absolutely requisite for political action. Moreover, nationalism is not only problematic in its national form. To transpose this approach to the European level would involve similar problems, even in its apparently progressive and critical version as "constitutional patriotism".

In all forms of nationalism, the problem lies in the postulate that a specific community is characterized by certain positive and historically-anchored values distinct from, and superior to, those of other communities and that these values deserve to be protected and promoted by political institutions, both inside and outside the community. For that reason, it is actually not very relevant to contrast anti-European "nationalists" and pro-European "post-nationalists" – or national eurosceptics and European federalists. Indeed, those two camps often share similar communitarian assumptions. A more conceptually and practically fruitful opposition should be made between communitarians, who plead for congruence between the legal community and the moral (or cultural) community and therefore encompass both nationalists

and euro-nationalists, and cosmopolitans, who dissociate identities from legal and political institutions, grounding them instead in universal principles.

Having exposed the dangers of nationalism, the paper further questioned the supposed essential role played by a common national identity in guaranteeing democracy and social justice, thereby attacking an instrumental reason for advocating nationalism. Many progressive communitarians consider that a deep identity substratum is indispensable for arousing the civic mobilization, solidarity, mutual trust and respect for majority decisions that are supposed to be the basis of any viable democracy and welfare system.

We rebutted this position first of all by arguing that human beings can easily feel attached and connected to others without sharing the same cultural features. This inbuilt empathic disposition goes far beyond particular cultural differences. And indeed, most cultural or religious traditions share certain fundamental values, such as the requirement not to treat others as means to en end, or to put oneself in others' shoes, demands which contribute to a capacity to think in terms of a collective organization based on the equal value of all human beings.

The article subsequently highlighted the fact that the existence of a latent universalistic consciousness is not sufficient to practically implement a cosmopolitan politics. We argued that history does not change mainly through the preaching of morally adequate and intellectually convincing ideas. Historical progress can come about only through social mobilizations and political struggles, so as to oblige, and not merely to urge, the privileged groups who have no interest in such a change. This criticism of idealistic visions of history can be used to contest the purported necessity of an identity substratum to put in place and support progressive institutions, but also to counteract the postulate – shared by many cosmopolitans – that altruistic values are an indispensable condition for progressive institutions. Democracy and redistributive social systems have historically resulted less from a common identity or shared values than from strong mobilizations. The latter were often encouraged by ideologies that appealed not only to the hearts and emotions but also to the interests of the dominated groups. We also argued that, once established, progressive institutions have a chance of being supported only in so far as they allow an autonomous collective decision, as well as fulfillment of effective individual rights. In other words, their legitimacy should rely on the fact that they meet citizens' interests, and not on a common identity or common values.

Certainly, progressive values are crucial to any emancipatory ideology, in particular if mobilizations are to be aroused. We should therefore not give up defending cosmopolitan ideals *per se*. However, these ideals should appeal to individual and collective interests if we want to generate a more effective mobilization. Even if we did not have the space to tackle this question in this paper, we can briefly mention that an ideology linking cosmopolitanism with the (individual and collective) inter-

ests of most ordinary citizens should probably give priority to the principle of individual freedom[52].

Our last section clarified our interpretation of cosmopolitanism as an alternative to nationalism. This perspective, first of all, requires being deeply aware of the gap existing between reality and ideals. It claims, as explained above, that the advent of a cosmopolitan framework associated with progressive policies requires us to combine the promotion of ideals with social and political interest-based struggles: the main engine of social change resides less in values, ideas and identities than in social mobilization based on individual and collective interests. This does not mean that ideas do not matter – either in their cognitive or axiological form – but that, by themselves, they are not able to trigger substantial change. In order to do so, they need to be connected – in the form of political ideologies – to the perceived interests of dominated groups.

Second, the cosmopolitanism very briefly alluded to in this paper is explicitly progressive. It promotes a demanding interpretation of democratic and social progress and is extremely critical of existing reality. It requires a strong popular sovereignty capable of controlling and transforming the economic system in a satisfying direction for the majority of citizens. The main objective here, central to the cosmopolitan spirit, is the effective application of extended individual rights. At the origin of cosmopolitanism, lies this idea that individual dignity and freedom should be of paramount importance for both ethics and politics, regardless of particular contexts or affiliations. Ideally, the conditions to fulfill this ideal should be realized at the world level. But considering the current economic and political conditions, it is more realistic for now to advance this project at the regional level – in our case, the European one. Nonetheless, this revival of sovereignty should not be accompanied by a European communitarian rhetoric.

This approach thus avoids another rather common pitfall in cosmopolitan positions, namely, the confusion between a position on identity, and the level at which the organization of power should take place. Cosmopolitanism should only define the way in which we perceive collective identities and their relationship with politics. It should not be associated as such with specific policies, institutions and levels of power. If the political project combined with the cosmopolitanism espoused here is clearly progressive and hence requires a powerful democratic and economic sovereignty, it is much more realistic to advocate a regional organization of this sovereignty. The latter should however be distinct from what we have now in the European Union. Indeed, the current transfers of sovereignty to supranational levels are very far from meeting the demands of a progressive form of cosmopolitanism, namely, the full realization of broadly defined individual rights in order to guarantee individual freedom.

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[52] Heine, op. cit. 2013.