

What Do We Have in Common? Modernity and the Paradoxes of Postnational Integration

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Abstract

This article tries to develop an antiessentialist theoretical framework for understanding the notion of modernity and its current changes from a nation-state institutionalization of modernity to a postnational one. It refers to Lyotard's "Postmodern Condition" and discusses three topics of Lyotard's description of modernity: the social science representation of modernity, the paradox of social integration under modern conditions, and the question of whether there is something like a normative foundation in the concept of modernity. It is argued that a theory of modernity has to be a theory of world society. On the one hand an antiessentialist approach to modernity and its postnational changes stresses both the necessity and impossibility of social integration and differentiates between a national and a postnational solution of the paradox of modernity. On the other it describes – with reference to Nancy and Derrida – the normative content of modernity as a structural unfinished community building.

What Do We Have in Common? Modernity and the Paradoxes of Postnational Integration

Twenty-five years after Jean-François Lyotard published his *Postmodern Condition* there is still a debate on the notion of modernity and how this has changed over the last decades. In this debate one can find several descriptions for the current changes of modernity: modernity today means 'postmodernity' (Lyotard), 'multiple modernities'" (Eisenstadt, 2000), 'second or reflexive modernity' (Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994)

or 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000). On the other hand Bruno Latour (1993) doubts that there ever was something like a pure modernity. In the following I will discuss three key aspects of modernity: I start with a reminder on Lyotard's "Postmodern Condition" where three key aspects are laid out (1). After that I examine the theories key aspects: the social science representation of modernity (2), the question of what it means to say that we live in a modern or postmodern (world) society (3), and the normative content of modernity (4). Through this discussion I develop an antiessentialist theoretical framework for understanding modernity and its current changes. The focus of this article is the problem of social integration in modernity; because, from a sociological point of view, the question of what we have in common is the basic problem of the structure of modern societies and its changes.

There are three main arguments for an antiessentialist understanding of social integration: first, it is a characteristic for the "discursive strategies" (Andersen, 2003) of anti-essentialism to ask not for normative foundations, but for the conditions of the possibility for integration and to show that they are always connected to conditions of impossibility and thereby to a paradox. According to authors such as Lyotard, Laclau, Žižek, Butler, integration is only necessary when it is impossible, i.e. when it remains bound to a specific, constituting and de-constituting border. Wishing to reconstruct the specific modern solution of this paradox, it is necessary to leave the level of reformulating theoretical concepts. Insofar as the change of modern to postmodern or from national to post-national forms of social integration is concerned, those theories that are useful to create an anti-essentialist concept of integration – such as the theory of civil society of Lefort and Gauchet or the theory of hegemony of Laclau and Mouffe – are finally stuck to a methodological nationalism, because integration in those theories is always thought from the national composed political system. Compared to that it seems to be necessary to switch to a "methodological cosmopolitanism" (Beck, 2000), so in the next step I will outline, a world society perspective on the question of social integration. In short, post-modernity means from the world society per-

spective that the national construction of a social bond became implausible. Processes of debordering and a corresponding transformation of the social bond are rather to be recognized in the course of new post-national reborderings. With these roughly outlined changes, the question arises as to whether an appropriate form of social integration is even possible, in other words whether modernity has a normative content. So finally, I advocate along with authors such as Derrida, Bauman and Nancy - to look for this normative content within the paradox of integration itself, which means that each normative order always remains contingent and refers to a "community to come" (Derrida, 1997).

Twenty-five Years After

In *The Postmodern Condition* Lyotard (1984) makes two decisive arguments, both of which determined the discussion on postmodernity without being systematically referred to each other. The first argument concerns theories of modernity - the self-description of modern societies, to say it from a sociological point of view (see Luhmann, 1998). Lyotard objects to normative and functionalistic theories as they do not reflect their own social conditions. Consequently, they are not able to grasp the actual social changes appropriately. In contrast to this, he demands a different theoretical design, a new and anti-essentialist concept of a theory of modernity, a demand that he tried to fulfil in his following books (for example see Lyotard, 1992; 1988). The second argument is a sociological one that uses a temporal concept of modernity; according to Lyotard, postmodern societies are characterized by a transformation of central elements of modern societies: for example, by a functional change of the state, the decay of modern legitimating patterns or the differentiation of autonomous knowledge domains:

What is new in all of this is that the old poles of attraction represented by nation-states, parties, professions, institutions, and historical traditions are losing their attraction. And it does not look as though they will be replaced, at least not on their former scale (Lyotard, 1984: 14).

Summarizing Lyotard's outline of the transformation of modern societies one can say that we live in a post-heroic political world without a strong identification with political units like the European Union or even the United Nations and not with organizations like churches or trade unions. So what Lyotard is describing here is nothing else than a process of individualisation – like Ulrich Beck (see for example Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001) has been doing since the 1980s – pointing out the consequences for the problem of social cohesion.¹

While Lyotard's first argument is directed against a certain interpretation of social science concepts and sociological representation of social life, he shows with his second argument that these concepts are no longer plausible under existing social conditions. *The Postmodern Condition* in this regard represents a "redescription" (Hesse, 1980) of modernity and its transformation.

The sociological discussion on Lyotard's book and on other works concerning postmodernity concentrated on two points: either 1. on the problem of appropriate social science concepts and on developing a new anti-essentialist perspective as in works on cultural turn, on constructivism, on anti-essentialism, on post-feminism (see Fuchs, 2001), or 2. on the thesis of a fundamental social change of modern societies. In the latter case the question was posed whether reflexivity or differentiation, late capitalism, or multiple modernities are appropriate descriptions of the social changes and transformations of Modernity. Especially the discussion on different cultural concepts of modernity has shown that the key term "modernity" implies more than just a more distanced sociological description of society, but a performative way of setting normative standards and expectations. In essence, both points are referring to one another: using modernity as a social science concept means that an observer reproduces a specific self description of a society as a modern one – without reflecting his own blind spot in doing so. According to Lyotard, the agenda of anti-essentialist, or postmodern theories therefore is a comprehensive description of society under conditions of anti-essentialist theory concepts as recently seen by Agamben (1998), by Hardt and Negri (2001), Žižek (2000) or Luhmann (1997; 2002).

At the end of *The Postmodern Condition*, a third theme is merely touched on by Lyotard: the question of justice, where he begins to develop a model of local justice that he later developed more fully (Lyotard, 1988). Lyotard argues against Habermas' discourse ethics: 'Consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value. But justice as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect. We must thus arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus' (1984: 66). For Lyotard, justice does not mean following a (just) rule but seeing the absence of such a rule. So being just needs a recognition of the heterogeneity of language games and a limitation of consensus to local actors and communal contexts. (Lyotard, 1984: 66). A postmodern justice needs to be both local and open for groups and positions which are not included today; justice is more than a mere local consensus but at the same time only possible as a local consensus (see Bonacker, 2000a; 2001).

Lyotard's critics first stated that the normative standards of modernity had not been sufficiently considered. In their opinion, Lyotard, like Foucault, sacrificed the normative standards for a point of view that describes society as a strategic operating field and arena for different interests and forms of life (see Habermas, 1990). Nevertheless, it eventually turned out that with an anti-essentialist theoretical concept, normative questions do not have to be thrown overboard. To date, several works have strived to formulate the normative promise of modernity by altered theoretical and social conditions (see Bauman, 1993; Menke, 2001; García Düttmann, 2002; Bonacker, 2000b).

The Modern Paradox and the Paradox of Modernity

The question of what we have in common marks a, perhaps central, problem of modern societies. The discussion brought up by Shmuel Eisenstadt (2000) concerning 'multiple modernities' could be carried on by distinguishing various cultural traditions of modernity, the way they answered that question, and the way the question will be answered in a globalized world society. Eisenstadt pointed out that today many of those answers are no longer based on models of the nation-state, but on ethnic, local, regional and transnational identities.²

In these settings, local concerns and interests are often brought together in new ways, going beyond the model of the classical nation-state, choosing alliances with transnational organizations such as the European Union or with broad religious framework rooted in the great religions of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or the Protestant branches of Christianity. Simultaneously, we see a continuing decomposition in the relatively compact image offered by belief systems concerning styles of life, defining 'civilized man'; all connected with the emergence and spread of the original program of modernity. No one can doubt that significant and enduring shifts are taking place in the relative position and influence of different centers of modernity – moving back and forth between West and East. This can only produce increased contention between such centers over their degree of influence in a globalizing world (Eisenstadt, 2000: 18).

The different centers of modernity, according to Eisenstadt, are different, not only because of their different understandings of modernity, but because of their different solutions to the problem of integration, which is in some respect the key problem of all modern societies. The problem of social integration is in any case constitutive of modern society. There are two reasons for this: firstly, the position of the individual became problematic due to the change-over from a stratified society. Affiliations, loyalties and shared interests had to be produced as well as solidarity among foreign and spatially separated individuals. Secondly, this change of primary social differentiation also put common traditional values and norms to the test. In this context, Habermas (1992: 27) speaks of an increase in the 'risk of dissent' in the course of processes of rationalization and secularization. Even if one mistrusts such vocabulary of modernization theory, it has to be stated that by the beginning of modernity integration, as a social task and universality as a regulative idea of an all-inclusive commonness, became a main topic (see Peters, 1993; Marshall, 1980).

Roughly speaking, three positions have developed; the first proceeds from the strengthened necessity of social integration in modern societies. In this communitarian view, what a society has in common must

be intensified especially since the social bond is fragile and especially because - due to the processes of differentiation and pluralization - it is unclear what we commonly share and what a common authenticity could be (see Taylor, 1991; for a critique of a political theory based on the concept of authenticity see Noetzel, 1999).

In contrast to this, the second position sees no necessity for a social integration and, in addition to this, no *possibility* for it as modern societies successively dissolved the potentials for a strong social bond. The political theory of liberalism as well as the recent systems theory agree that the mechanisms of functional inclusion are enough for reproducing society, so we do not actually need anything in common beyond the rules of inclusion in society (see Rawls, 1980; Luhmann, 1997). To put it in terms of Max Weber (1922), who himself has a different view: for modern societies *Vergemeinschaftung* is not as constitutive as the mechanisms of *Vergesellschaftung*.

The third position stresses the necessity of social integration, but points out that the social conditions have changed into a reflexive modernity without a homogenous cultural construction of social bonds. For Beck reflexive modernity is characterized by an heterogeneity of post-traditional social bonds and post-national imagined communities. The development of new reflexive solutions of integration problems is from that point of view both uncertain, but necessary (see Beck, 2003: 16). In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard himself took a position which is quite near to the third one when discussing the postmodern locality of new social bonds. And he objects that the first position is nothing other than an ideological answer to the deconstruction of the 'grand Narratives':

This breaking up of the grand Narratives[...]leads to what some authors analyze in terms of the dissolution of the social bond and the disintegration of social aggregates into a mass of individual atoms [...]. Nothing of the kind is happening: this point of view, it seems to me, is haunted by the paradisaic representation of a lost 'organic' society (Lyotard, 1984: 15; see also Nancy, 1991).

Concerning the second position, of an impossibility of social integration, Lyotard raises the objection that it trusts blindly and affirmatively in the power of the functional systems. Systems theory today is, according to Lyotard, technocratic and too much interested in the frictionless functioning of social systems. (Lyotard, 1984: 12).

An interesting alternative – Lyotard calls it the “postmodern alternative” – to the functionalistic perspective on social integration appeared in the course of the debates on the anti-essentialism of social scientific and political concepts. In this context, the theory of hegemony by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1994; Laclau, 1994; 1996) takes a new look at the modern problem of integration so far as it describes integration as necessary and impossible at the same time and thereby as a paradox.

The starting point of an anti-essentialist concept of social integration was formed by the theory on civil societies by Claude Lefort and Marcel Gauchet. Lefort and Gauchet (Lefort, 1996) traced the modern problem of integration back to the constitutive division of modern societies: the separation of the symbolic legitimation of power from its execution. For Lefort and Gauchet, modernity is equivalent to the impossibility to legitimate political power entirely by the reference to something which is outside society, such as god or nature. The symbolic position of power remains empty under modern conditions, firstly because legitimation always refers to a particular social context, and secondly because of that it always stays contested. According to this, integration takes place within conflicts among various concepts of orders within a democratic public sphere (see also the works of Dubiel, 1994).

The conclusion of Lefort and Gauchet is not convincing from the point of view of the theory of hegemony; in contrast to the theory of civil society, the theory of hegemony seeks the paradox *within* the structure of the symbolic itself. For Laclau, symbolization means that something is *constituted* symbolically. By that, symbolic representation is nothing additional, but constitutes what it represents since there is no

essence of a community which has to be represented, but representation is nothing other than 'doing community'. This process of representation Laclau called 'hegemony', a process which 'itself creates retroactively the entity to be represented' (Laclau, in Laclau, Butler and Žižek, 2000: 66). Therefore without representation, the subject to be represented – like a political or ethnical community or other forms of collective actors – does not exist. At the same time, representation means that there is a common symbolic reference point with which founding a community is possible. That is why integration from the perspective of the theory of hegemony is executed in a symbolic way as symbolic integration. In other words, due to their constitutive disintegration, modern societies still can only *symbolically* become integrated (see, for a theory of symbolic integration, Bonacker and Brodocz, 2001; Bonacker, 2002).

The paradox that is connected to the theory of hegemony lies in the structure of the symbolic itself, since only that which must be represented is constitutively absent. Otherwise there would be no necessity to symbolize it. For example, the ethical substance of a given community 'represent(s) an object which is simultaneously impossible and necessary. As impossible, it is incommensurable with any normative order'. In this case we usually speak of a particular community with shared moral standards and life forms which are different from other communities. 'As necessary, it has to have access to the field of representation, which is possible only if the ethical substance is invested in some form of normative order' (Laclau, in Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000: 84). In this case, a community represents the different values and life forms of their individual members. So the symbolic representation of a community has to be both: it must make a difference to other communities or to the 'other' of a community and it must integrate different life forms to one social totality.

Consequently, the failure of the representation of a community goes along with the necessity of symbolic integration. Laclau explains this by means of the dialectics of universality and particularism. The common symbolic reference point embodies a universality that cannot be

deceived by anybody, and to which all particular legitimate identities have to refer. This universal is an “empty place” (Laclau) which is filled by the one particular that is capable of representing the unity of different identities because it is identified with them. According to Laclau, this symbolic place of the universal cannot stay empty and at the same time liquefied by civil society because particular identities always must have a transcendent content. Otherwise they could not be perceived as identities in the context of a common order and thus would not be symbolically integrated.

The particular embodiment of the universal, according to Laclau, is an expression of hegemony, because this filling of the symbolic place firstly is contingent and secondly the symbolization always stays bound to a border that it as such cannot transgress. In other words: the universal is itself constituted by a paradox because on the one hand it is the opposite of particular communities but on the other it depends on them. The universal, as we have seen, does not have a concrete content of its own (which would close it on itself), but is an always receding horizon resulting from the expansion of an indefinite chain of equivalent demands. The conclusion seems to be that universality is incommensurable with any particularity but cannot, however, exist apart from the particular. (Laclau, 1996: 34)

For Laclau this paradox of universality is the condition of modernity so his answer to any theoretical or political attempt to solve the paradox is that its non-solution is the very precondition of democracy. The solution of the paradox would imply that a particular body had been found, which would be the *true* body of the universal. But in that case, the universal would have found its necessary location, and democracy would be impossible. If democracy is possible, it is because the universal has no necessary body and no necessary content; different groups, instead, compete between themselves to temporarily give to their particularisms a function of universal representation (Ibid.).

Therefore the process of integration is as conflictual as well as incomplete.

Looking at the field of different anti-essentialist social theories, it would be possible to distinguish here between a quasi-transcendental and an empirical - or quasi-empirical - reading of hegemony, or between a deconstructive and a psychoanalytical interpretation of hegemony (see for a wider discussion Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000). On the one hand, the condition of the possibility of symbolic integration is connected to the impossibility of representing something truly. 'The representation of the unrepresentable constitutes the terms of the paradox within hegemony is constructed' (Laclau, in Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000: 57). Each symbolic fill-in is therefore inadequate and expresses its constitutive impossibility. Whether or not this is *empirical* depends on the success of the hegemonial representation of the universal. This empirical success - or failure, respectively - plays a decisive role in the psychoanalytical reading of hegemony. The failure becomes evident where an event takes place that challenges the hegemony as such, because it cannot be integrated in an existing symbolic order. For Žižek (2002), true emancipative politics therefore has to be anti-hegemonial, i.e. it must challenge the existing hegemony.

The success of a hegemonial representation can be read from the integrative power of the symbol. The more it is indiscriminating against various particular identities, the more integrative its results are. Accordingly, hegemony consists of the *empirical ability* of a symbol being connected with as many different meanings as possible in order to become able to express the unity of an order symbolically. From the perspective of the theory of hegemony, the idea of the nation works exactly like that: the national discourse integrates different identities that, consequently, appear as various interpretations of the same national collective identity.

According to Laclau, modernity constitutes itself by this impossibility and necessity of symbolic integration. Hegemony that owes itself to this paradox means in this context an integrative and legitimating power which is indispensable for a social order coming into existence. However, there is always something that resists this symbolization. Žižek (2000) referred to this as "the real", i.e., something that prevents

a symbolic closure of the social order because it cannot be integrated. At the same time, it is a condition for the symbolic constitution of a social order.

From National to Postnational Integration

The theory of civil society as well as the theory of hegemony thus reformulate social science concepts within which a theory of modernity is operating. The way the modern society solves its integration paradox empirically remains for the most part undecided, though the necessity of this solution is maintained theoretically. In a way, both theories stick to a methodological nationalism and a container-model of society, that identifies the borders of society with political borders (see Beck, 2004). Nevertheless, this restriction is neither compelling nor contextually close, as the accentuation of the performative power of symbolic integration shows that these social scientific identifications of state and society themselves are a part of a specific solution of the modern integration paradox. The social sciences themselves have participated in the national discourse and reproduced it via the “myth of cultural integration” (Archer, 1985).

Mindful of Lyotard’s remark that postmodern societies are characterized by a transformation of modern, nation-state based institutions, it seems to be efficient for a theory of modernity to take the perspective of a world society (see the works of the World Society Research Group: WSRG, 2001). Beyond that, the connection between modernity and world society is obvious, because, as Beck and others have pointed out, modernity was a global project right from its beginning:

When the grandiose concept of ‘world history’ became a topic of lively discussion in the 18th and 19th centuries, it meant both secular history and the history of mankind as a whole. But at the very moment when world history became conceivable, it was broken up and walled off into a history of nations and a history of states. The horror at the unbounded openness of the modern world was answered almost immediately by the closedness of the nation-state, both as an idea and as an institutional reality (Beck, Bonss and Lau, 2003: 11).

If it make sense to conceptualize a theory of modernity as a theory of world society, two different things become apparent: firstly, the modern, hegemonial, national solution of the integration paradox and its historical contingency; and secondly, its transformation into a “post-national constellation” (Habermas, 2001).

To take on the perspective of the world society does not mean that we are on the way to a global community. Thus it is not about the hopes of an ingenuous globalism on global democracy and a global consensus referring to common values and norms (see Held, 1996). On the contrary, world society studies show that world society is not constituted via a normative consensus but via structural similarities. From the perspective of the world society it is possible to see that rights, economy, religion and politics are global phenomena on the one hand, while on the other they have developed differently, in their respective national or local contexts.³ At the same time, it becomes clear that political borders between nations are borders *within* the world society (see Burton, 1972; with regard to political borders Meyer, Boli, Thomas and Ramirez, 1997; Pace and Stetter, 2003).

Moreover, political borders have a special function for the evolution of world society as they refer to the specific modern solution of the integration paradox. The social construction of community runs in modernity first of all via forms of national integration. That what we do have in common accordingly constitutes under the conditions of the nation-state. From the world society perspective it is becoming clear that these conditions are contingent: integration by the nation-state itself is a global phenomenon because economy, religion, legal systems, science or even sports in modernity develop within a frame of a bordered nation-state. Next to that, specific forms of solidarity and loyalty grow among the members of the nation-state, which transcend other particular identities.

According to Laclau, this national construction of what we have in common is contingent, so far as it can be held true, as an expression of a hegemony within the context of the world society. For this hege-

mony, three aspects are crucial: firstly, the symbolic representation of the nation constructs “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1987). What we have in common constitutes, via this representation, something that stands for the unity of a nation and which makes us members of a political community. Secondly, a specific political inclusion is connected to it. The members of a symbolically constructed community are equipped with participation rights, claims to subsidies, education, knowledge, freedom of worship and so on. Only when forms of symbolic integration are bound up with a specific functional inclusion in social systems can it be called a hegemony, because not until then does an institutional union between the factual and the symbolic part of power come into existence. In other words, finding out which construction of the common will succeed is not only a question of its symbolic power, but also of its ability to organize inclusion. Thirdly, the representation of the nation and the organization of national inclusion is territorially anchored. However, it is part of the hegemony that it produces and reproduces a determined social place.

Thereby, the cornerstones of the answer of the modern society on its integration paradox are outlined: integration, as a hegemony, takes place by the coupling of symbolic representation at specific forms of organized inclusion on the territory of a sovereign nation.

But for an anti-essentialist concept of integration, this is only partially true. Integration - or more precisely, the solution of the integration paradox - is indeed necessary but at the same time impossible, i.e. each social construction of what we have in common is hegemonial and by that, contingent. In other words, it is never truly universal but always “contaminated” by a certain particularity, as Laclau (1996: 55) put it. Following the deconstructive reading of the hegemony, this contamination and contingency are on principle. So the point is in this view that there is no integration without some kind of disintegration.⁴

In contrast to that, the Lacanian reading of hegemony stresses the paradox that survives within the national integration and appears empirically something like a living paradox:

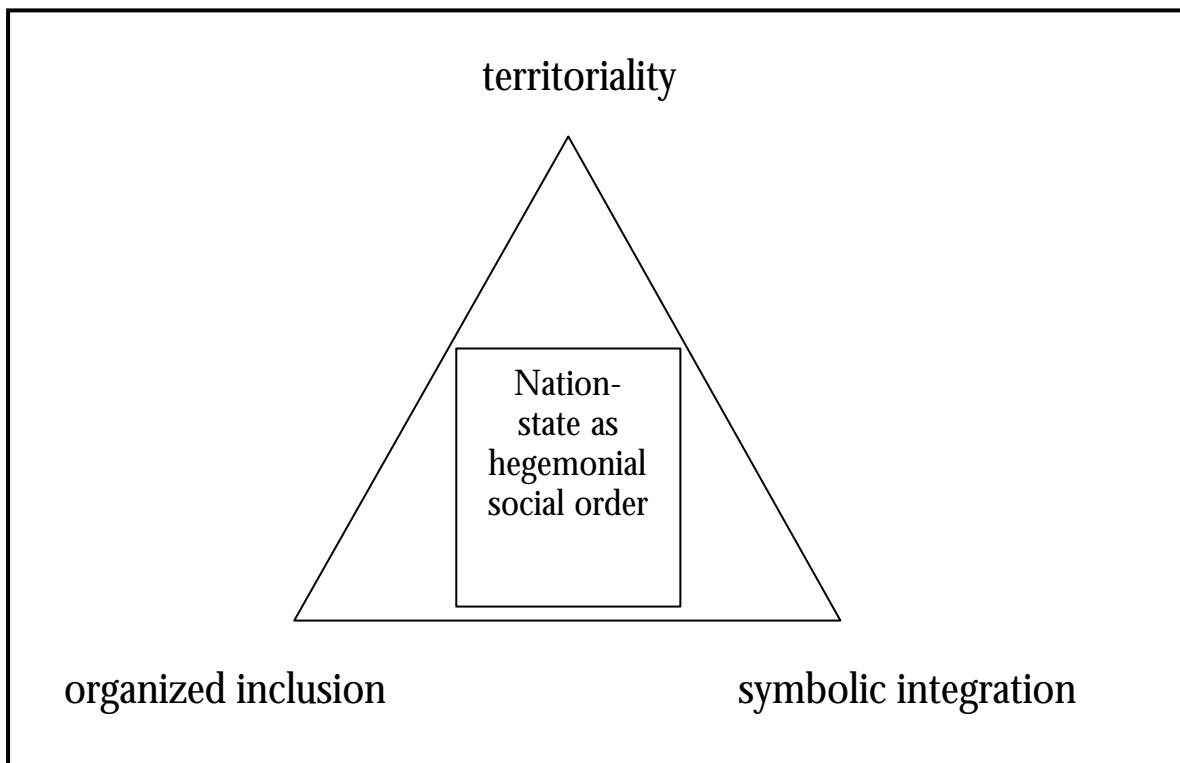


Fig. 1: Three dimensions of the Nation-State as a Social Order

This paradox of filling-out the empty place of the Supreme Good defines the modern notion of Nation. The ambiguous and contradictory nature of the modern nation is the same as that of vampires and other living dead: they are wrongly perceived as 'leftovers from the past'; their place is constituted by the very break of modernity (Žižek, 1993: 154; see also Žižek, 1994).

Consequently, according to Žižek, the so called included excluded - the organic, pre-modern - can return at any time in the national construction of what we have in common.

Meanwhile, next to such a returning disintegration of integration by the nation-state, there are sufficient indications for the fact that the modern national solution of the integration paradox is no longer plausible (see Albrow, 1996). The persistent weakness of the integrating power of the nation-state may be traced back essentially to a process of decoupling: the decoupling of the affiliation to a symbolically represented political community of forms of nationally organized inclu-

sion. In the context of world society studies, this process was also interpreted as *debordering*, accordingly, on the one side, functional systems emancipate from their national bordering. On the other side, the symbolic representation of what we have in common dissolves from its territorial anchorage (see Albert, Jacobson and Lapid, 2001; Weller, 2000). Examples of that can be found in the development of post national collective identities in the course of migration processes, the debate on a postnational citizenship which does not link the political right of participation with an affiliation to a particular political community or the meaning of human rights, which leave their national reference point and transnationalize and deterritorialize the political system.

Debordering does not simply mean the removal of borders, but to the same degree *rebordering*, due to the fact that the integrating paradox does not disappear, only because its dissolution by the nation-state is no longer convincing. The integration paradox is a modern phenomenon, i.e. it is constitutive for the modern society and it is a global phenomenon because a modern society is a world society from its beginning. So the question is: what takes the place of the hegemony by the nation-state?

We can see several different answers here concerning the description of new postnational forms of integration. One emphasizes international institutions, another the globalization of the market and of democracy. A third one is perhaps sceptical about the possibility of a worldwide integration in general. But from a conceptual point of view, ignoring the differences of these answers, one can say that it is quite probable that these postnational forms of integration will not be ordered anymore as they were in the nation-state. Instead of a – perhaps imaginary – coupling of forms of inclusion with a form of political community bounded to a certain territory today, we see an incongruency of different borders and orders (Bös, 2001). But deciding for hegemonial solutions of the integration paradox is the connection of inclusion and representation within a certain social order. For example, this could happen within the context of the constitution of regions or

in the course of the foundation of transnational regimes, or even as an effect of processes of retribalisation in areas in which nations do not even function anymore. It is obvious that these postnational forms of construction of what we have in common are due to a fundamental paradox that can afflict it at any time. Under modern conditions, attempts of ordering will never get rid of their contingency.

Has Modernity a Normative Content?

Some authors have suggested that in the postnational constellation globalism or cosmopolitanism is the functional alternative of state centered social integration (see Held, 1996; Beck, 2000). But for an anti-essentialist approach of social integration, globalism can only become a hegemonial representation of world society and therefore function as an integrative symbol if it would be the symbolic reference point of the social construction of different identities which are part of one global collective identity on the one hand and an institutional reality of political inclusion on the other. If this will be ever the case is an empirically open question,⁵ but one can say that postnational constellation insofar the normative notion of modernity is concerned includes a special kind of reflexivity: a shift from 'determinate judgement and rule following to rule-finding' as Scott Lash (2003: 55) points out. This situation of rule-finding, or of a creation of new rules, goes along with a consciousness of contingency. Therefore one can find a general skepticism in current social theory on the possibility to reconstruct a normative foundation of modernity.

From the beginning, the question concerning the normative content of modernity was an aspect of the discussion on modernity and post-modernity. The answer of Jürgen Habermas (1990) to authors like Lyotard, Derrida or Foucault was that they would contribute to the liquefying of the normative standards of modernity. Thereby, they would not be able to distinguish sufficiently between democratic and totalitarian forms of social integration. However, this reproach overlooks that - right from the start - it deals within the context of the discussion on anti-essentialist concepts with the question of a possible salvation

and reformulation of the normative content of modernity. In this context, the debate can be pointed to the question of whether the paradox of a simultaneous necessity, and impossibility of the construction of what we have in common, implies something normative.

If we follow Laclau, each symbolic construction of what we have in common is firstly a political question: 'society is configured as an ethico-political space, and the latter presupposes contingent articulations' (Laclau, in Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000: 50). That means that there is no compelling normative reason to prefer a certain construction of what we have in common. This is a merely a matter of deciding, i.e., finding the human rights more adequately referring to the symbolic construction of what is in common than the nation is. Nevertheless, Laclau distinguishes between a contingent hegemony and its transcending moment which is within each hegemony. In other words, hegemony always includes an ethical moment that exceeds each concrete commonness, but can never be institutionalized. Therefore, for Laclau (in Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000: 85) 'everything turns around the possibility of keeping always open and ultimately undecided the moment of articulation between the particularity of the normative order and the universality of the ethical moment.'

Presently, we can also speak of a 'normative power of contingency' (Bonacker, 2000b) – a power that exposes that which we have in common as particular and also carries along a universal content. Accordingly, there is no institutionalized community that would be appropriate to this content. At the same time, this means that each concrete community always gives evidence of something else - of a 'community to come', that in Derrida's words is approaching without ever arriving (Derrida, 1997). Contingency, as well as the community to come, would have no food without these attempts and without the symbolic construction of what we have in common. Thereby one can say that the normative content of modernity behaves parasitary to the modern institutions.

This does not seem to be a regulative idea that aims at the community to come as something unreachable, that has already always been reached. This approaching community rather withdraws the attempts of its objectivation. More precisely: it *is* this withdrawal, it *is* the impossibility of a concretization, it is the separation between the symbolization and the symbolized, a specific disintegration of each form of integration. That is why the community to come as such is not dissolvable. Perhaps Jean-Luc Nancy (1991: 35) expressed this differentiation between a community as work and an unrepresentable community most distinctly by stating:

A society may be as little communitarian as possible; it could not happen that in the social desert there would not be, however slight, even inaccessible, some community. [...] Only the fascist masses tend to annihilate community in the delirium of an incarnated communion. Symmetrically, the concentration camp – and the extermination camp, the camp of exterminating concentration – is in essence the will to destroy community. But even in the camp itself, undoubtedly, community never entirely ceases to resist this will. Community is, in a sense, resistance itself: namely, resistance to immanence. Consequently, community is transcendence: but ‘transcendence’, which no longer has any ‘sacred’ meaning’.

This characterization of community that transgresses each community and forms a kind of community without community, of something like a “being singular plural” (Nancy, 2000), implies that under the condition of modernity it is indeed not possible not to ask the question of community. But at the same time we cannot neglect this question. What we have in common is therefore *the* undecidable question of modern societies, because we modern human beings need something in common, we need a ‘we’ without really having one.

However, Nancy (2000: 76) wrote, the ‘we’ is not nothing; it is ‘someone’ each time, just as ‘each one’ is someone. Moreover, this is why there is no universal ‘we’: on the one hand, ‘we’ is said each time of some configuration, group, or network, however small or large; on the other hand, ‘we’ say ‘we’ for ‘every-

one', for coexistence of the entire universe of things, animals, and people that is mute and without 'us'.

So the only common thing we have is the fact that every single community is inadequate to our 'we' and this 'we' that cannot be fixed is at the same time the transgression of an empirical community. This fragile 'we' can be hurt and it can even be nearly destroyed. This is exactly why we are asked to care for what we have in common. We are ultimately responsible for it without being able to get rid of it, and that is exactly what modernity in its normative aspect means: to have something in common without living in community. So, with Nancy, one can say that modernity means that every – national, ethnical or religious – construction of community, as necessary as it is for building a society, must fail. What we share in modern times is this failure which was covered by the imagined community of the nation state. And what we then need in a postnational time is a universal culture of this failure.

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Endnotes

1. It was Emile Durkheim (1893) who stresses first the connection between modernization and the process of individualization. But for Durkheim individualization is both a problem of social integration and its solution. But from a postnational point of view this - theoretical and empirical - solution of the problem of social integration only works in a national integrated world society.
2. And one important question discussed in contemporary empirical sociology is why, after the so called decline of the nation-state, societies are not breaking apart and what are the mechanisms of a postnational integration. See, for one of the most important cases - the United States - Hall & Lindholm, 1999.
3. See, for a more empirical look at this, Wang, 2000.
4. From that point of view a normative conception of social integration is no longer plausible, because it cannot explain why such a concept of integration needs its difference for pointing out what integration means. One can find this argument in the work of Max Weber (1922) who also stresses that the infringement of norms is constitutive for their obtainment.
5. For an analysis of the everyday experience of cosmopolitan modernity see, notably, Nava, 2002.

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