



Hans Köchler

NATION AND CIVILIZATION IN THE GLOBAL AGE

Keynote speech

International interdisciplinary seminar
History, Global Identities and New Civilizations

organized by

globus et locus

in co-operation with

Università degli Studi di Milano & Associazione Italiana di Sociologia (AIS)
& Associazione di teoria politica Lorella Cedroni

Palazzo Feltrinelli
Gargnano del Garda (Italy), 18 October 2019

PREPRINT VERSION

© by Hans Köchler, 2019-2020. All rights reserved.

INTERNATIONAL PROGRESS ORGANIZATION
Kohlmarkt 4, A-1010 Vienna, Austria · www.i-p-o.org

I

Social organization as framework of survival

In philosophical discourses on the *conditio humana* it has become commonplace to refer to Aristotle's dictum “ὁ ἄνθρωπος φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον (...) ἐστίν.”¹ The Aristotelian definition not merely implies that the individual needs the group (community) for survival, it also means that the human being can only *advance* – or prosper – in a social context, whether in terms of language, art, science, or technology. All these areas of human activity constitute culture in the widest sense of the word.²

In the history of mankind, we witness a succession of increasingly complex forms of social organization. These are never mere agglomerations of individuals simply by chance, but specific forms of *cooperation with a purpose* – of collective survival, and, over time, existence in the sense of "good life," namely of cultural refinement. Ultimately, one might say, life is all about self-realization in a community, by using synergy effects through a division of tasks – an organization of labour – in different groups and networks. Through all periods of history, many and diverse forms of organization evolved along these lines. One of the main constants in the development of society has indeed been an *increase in complexity*.

If we look at the "classical" form of social organization in antiquity, the Greek city-state (πόλις), we can identify the basic concept that shaped historical discourses on the state in the Western world: πολιτεία (*civitas*) as community of citizens. In the ancient era of the city-state, this meant, first of all, *homogeneity* in terms of ethnicity and culture in each πόλις. Furthermore, it signified a need for *cooperation* among a multitude of such entities, to face external challenges in particular. In that period of antiquity, the basic issue was the relation with the Persian Empire. Cooperation dictated by necessity, in order to face an existential threat, resulted in an awareness among those πόλεις, those communities of citizens, of a *wider Greek community*, a togetherness that was enabled and shaped by a common language, in spite of the many and diverse Greek

¹ Πολιτικά 1, 1253a2.

² For the distinction between "culture" and "civilization" see note 4 below.

dialects. One might say that, long before the idea of "nation" emerged in Europe, there was a kind of national “awakening” in this particular historical constellation.³

Greek identity gradually evolved toward what we nowadays identify as "Hellenistic civilization."⁴ To a considerable extent, it was the result of the imperial conquests of Alexander the Great. In the wake of Alexander, the Greek language did reach a large area of the then-known world. In the Hellenistic period, after Alexander, Greek indeed became the κοινή γλῶσσα (common language),⁵ the *lingua franca* all through the later Roman and early Byzantine Empire, in a vast region covering the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The common language was a decisive factor in the development of the ancient *Christian* world that later became identified with *Western* civilization.

In this historical context, "civilization" must not be confused with "nation." Greek civilization did comprise diverse cultural traditions and political entities. There was a form of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic co-existence in a “life-world” (if I may borrow from Husserl’s philosophy),⁶ shaped by Greek civilization essentially on the basis of the language. One might also speak of a kind of ancient "Greek Commonwealth," but in a civilizational, not a narrow legal-political sense.

The situation was similar to later constellations under the Roman Empire and subsequently in the Middle Ages, when Latin became the *lingua franca*, particularly in the scholarly and legal fields. As was the case with Greek in the Hellenistic period, the language of the Romans was the dominant one due to imperial conquest. This aspect can be metaphorically highlighted in a Latin phrase that historians coined much later: *lingua Latina omnia vincit*. The language prevailed over so many local idioms also because the Roman Empire was victorious. It

³ Friedrich Hölderlin beautifully evoked the spirit of ancient Greece, mirrored – for him – in the Greek national uprising of the 1770s ("Orlov Revolt"), in the idealistic epistolary novel *Hyperion oder der Eremit in Griechenland* (1797): *Gesammelte Werke*. Bielefeld: Bertelsmann, 1958, pp. 311-470.

⁴ A note on terminology regarding the use of the terms "civilization" and "culture" in this text: We follow Samuel Huntington’s definition of civilization as “the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species.” (Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, p. 24.) This differs from the terminology in other languages such as German, where "civilization" and "culture" are distinct categories of human self-realization, the former relating to man's conquest of nature (in particular as described by the phrase "technical civilization"), the latter effectively denoting what in English is referred to as civilization in general (with cultures as "sub-civilizations").

⁵ It is also referred to simply as "Koine" or as Hellenistic or Biblical Greek.

⁶ Edmund Husserl introduced the term "Lebenswelt" in the later phase of his phenomenological research: *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften* (first ed. Belgrade, 1936). *Husserliana*, Vol. VI. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 2nd ed. 1962. See also Edmund Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt: Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution*. Ed. Rochus Sowa. *Husserliana*, Vol. XXXIX. Dordrecht: Springer, 2008.

would be disingenuous to deny that there always has existed a connection between *power* and *civilization*.

As in the earlier Hellenistic period, it was the *Roman civilization*, influenced by the earlier Greek *synthesis* – or perception – of the world, that, in the form of the Latin language, exerted decisive influence in a vast geographic space. Again, in this case too, the dynamic was not in any way related to something we nowadays would describe as "nation." It was about a multitude of distinct ethnic and linguistic communities that existed at that time and in that particular area, and whose life-world – or conception of reality – was shaped and refined by the Latin language. In the Middle Ages, this influence continued in the Christian framework, which was essentially formulated and developed in the conceptual system of Greco-Roman civilization. It is indeed the Greco-Roman world that provided the *λόγος*, the basic notions and concepts in terms of metaphysics and science, for the Christian world view.

The role of the Latin language not only in Christian theology, but also philosophy and science, is undeniable. For us in the West, in Europe and the United States, it certainly makes sense to teach ancient Greek and Latin as part of the curriculum of higher education. In my opinion, abandoning it – in the United States and, later, also in many European countries – was a big mistake. It has meant a substantial loss of historical memory and led to an increasing alienation from our cultural roots because it has deprived us of essential hermeneutical skills.⁷

II

Nation succeeds civilization

After a period of several centuries, the overarching civilizational unity (earlier Greek, later Latin), which I have just described, gradually receded into history. It was transformed into a multitude of increasingly assertive cultural communities that were essentially defined by language. It is to be noted that this transformation was not about cultural diversity *as such*. Diversity was an established fact in the commonwealth of the Latin world. The process was about organizational and political *self-assertion* of the different cultures that had existed under *one* civilizational roof, that of the Latin world. The evolution towards the modern nation-state – that,

⁷ This applies not only to the most basic issues of *etymology*, but also to the loss of an awareness of what Gadamer called "*Wirkungsgeschichte*" (reception history of ideas). See note 37 below.

in the 19th century, succeeded the imperial order of the Holy Roman Empire in Europe – has been precisely described and analyzed by Benedict Anderson in his opus magnum, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).⁸

In a cursory analysis of this development, three factors come to mind:

- 1) The emergence of vernacular languages as crystallizing points of the life-worlds of many distinct communities that had, through the centuries, relied on Latin as the language of reference: It cannot be denied that up to the present day many of these then-vernacular languages are deeply embedded in a Latin framework in terms of vocabulary and grammar, with Italian being the closest to the Latin roots.
- 2) The rapid development of scientific research in the course of the European *Renaissance*: One of the most consequential aspects of technical development in this era was the invention of the printing press, which suddenly made possible the large-scale distribution of texts in the vernacular languages. – To a considerable, though often neglected, extent the "rebirth" of European civilization was the result of the encounter of the medieval Christian world with the Arab-Islamic civilization in Andalusia, which acted as catalyst – and, above all, conveyor of Europe's forgotten ancient Greek heritage.⁹
- 3) A further factor, which is important in terms of the transformation towards nation and nation-state, is the emancipation from *absolutist rule* that for centuries had drawn its legitimation from what we describe in German with the term "*Gottesgnadentum*" – a doctrine that emphasizes the "divine right of Kings," or, more precisely in Latin, "*potestas Dei gratia*." This metaphysical justification of absolute rule was increasingly challenged with the arrival of *Enlightenment* in the course of the 18th century.

Accordingly, the emergence of the concept of the nation was intrinsically linked with the idea of *sovereignty* in the legal and political sense¹⁰ as opposed to subordination of the people

⁸ Rev. ed. London / New York: Verso, 2006.

⁹ Cf., *inter alia*: Muhammad Assad and Hans Zbinden (eds.), *Islam und Abendland: Begegnung zweier Welten*. Olten / Freiburg i. Br.: Walter-Verlag, 1960. – W. Montgomery Watt, *The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

¹⁰ On the concept of sovereignty in this context see Köchler, "Sovereignty, Law and Democracy versus Power Politics," in: *Current Concerns*, No. 34, Zurich, 22 November 2013, Supplement, pp. 18-25.

(individuals), as mere subjects, to the power of an absolute ruler who represents the divine will and order. In this regard, one may describe “nation” as a *community of people* sharing a cultural heritage that is essentially expressed in their language. Organizing their life and social relations in a *state* (nation-state), they distinguish themselves from other such communities. Alluding to the etymology of the Latin term “*de-finitio*,” one can characterize this as a process of self-definition where the community “draws the border,” or delimits its sovereign realm, vis-à-vis other such communities, also organized as states.

Similarly, Benedict Anderson, in his analysis of the origins of nationalism, characterizes nations as socially constructed.¹¹ He highlights the fact that people *imagine* themselves as co-existing with a number of equals (in terms of language and culture), most of whom they do not know personally. In our interpretation, the aspect of *imagined* community – or socially constructed identity – also applies to the concept of “popular will” in the modern theory of *democratic representation* (which has been adopted as quasi-official state doctrine in most of the Western world).¹² In a different theoretical setting (namely of idealistic essentialism), the notions of “*Volksganzheit*” (totality of the people) and, linked to it, “*Volkswille*” (popular will) were emphasized – in the period between the wars – in the state theory of Carl Schmitt¹³ and Gerhard Leibholz¹⁴ (who served as Judge at Germany's Constitutional Court after World War II).

As there is no such thing as “popular will” or “totality of the people” as an *empirical* reality, the construct of “representation” (*re-praesentatio*: literally, “again making present what is absent”) serves an essential purpose. The underlying issue is how to *legitimize* the exercise of power in the context of modern democracy. The respective office-holder – whether member of the executive or legislative branch – is seen to “represent,” and act on behalf of, the totality of the people, which is never physically present as such. This constructivist understanding of “nation” as a legal and political entity is necessarily based on the paradigm of *homogeneity*. The sovereign

¹¹ *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, chapter 3: “The Origins of National Consciousness,” pp. 39ff.

¹² Cf. Köchler, “Die Repräsentationslehre: Zum Problem des Idealismus in der politischen Theorie,” in: *Philosophie – Recht – Politik: Abhandlungen zur politischen Philosophie und zur Rechtsphilosophie*. Vienna / New York: Springer, 1985, pp. 27-45.

¹³ Carl Schmitt, *Verfassungslehre* [1928]. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 6th ed. 1983.

¹⁴ Gerhard Leibholz, *Das Wesen der Repräsentation unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Repräsentativsystems: Ein Beitrag zur allgemeinen Staats- und Verfassungslehre* (1929). 3rd, enlarged ed.: *Das Wesen der Repräsentation und der Gestaltwandel der Demokratie im 20. Jahrhundert*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1966. – For an analysis of the fictional character of the notion of representation cf. Köchler, “A Theoretical Examination of the Dichotomy between Democratic Constitutions and Political Reality,” in: Köchler, *World Order: Vision and Reality. Collected Papers Edited by David Armstrong*. New Delhi: Manak, 2009, pp. 122-131.

state is seen as unique form of organization of a particular nation in the sense of *Kulturnation*,¹⁵ i.e. as a community that has existed under one civilizational roof, so to speak, over an extended period of time. In this constructivist context, cultural diversity is not a fact *within* a particular nation, but exclusively *between* nations. It relates to the *simultaneous existence* of a multitude of such culturally homogenous nations as sovereign entities.

The concept of the nation-state, modeled on representation, has become the foundation of modern international law as a system of rules that govern relations between a multitude of sovereign actors on the basis of non-interference. This was also one of the essential elements – or achievements – of the *Peace of Westphalia* of 1648. The aspect of homogeneity is evident in one of the Westphalian Treaties' basic peace-making principles, *cuius regio, eius religio* ("whose realm, his religion").¹⁶ Diversity is relegated to the inter-national realm. This was how, after the Thirty Years War, the antagonists thought they could achieve durable peace, in an era that was characterized by religious disputes: as *system of co-existence among sovereign nations*. However, nationalism in the sense of an excessive emotional identification with one's own nation, existing as *one* unified state, also proved to be a risk to a stable order. The feeling of national belonging – what Anderson calls "deep horizontal comradeship"¹⁷ – was the fuel of many inter-state conflicts, including the world wars of the last century.

III

Disentanglement of nation and state

The modern understanding of the sovereign state as "nation-state" gradually changed with the further rapid development of technology and the massive wave of globalization in the 20th century. In a structurally similar way to the paradigm change that resulted, *inter alia*, from the

¹⁵ On the notions of "nation" and "state" cf. the author's 1993 lecture at the University of Bologna: "The Concept of the Nation and the Question of Nationalism: The Traditional 'Nation State' versus a Multicultural 'Community State'," in: Michael Dunne and Tiziano Bonazzi (eds.), *Citizenship and Rights in Multicultural Societies*. Keele: Keele University Press, 1995, pp. 44-51.

¹⁶ The parties to the treaties (Treaty of Münster and Treaty of Osnabrück, 1648) eventually recognized the principle of the earlier Peace of Augsburg (1555) according to which each ruler has the right to determine the religion of his own state.

¹⁷ Anderson explains that the sovereign state "is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality (...), the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." (*Imagined Communities*, p. 7.)

earlier separation of church and state (i.e. the end of "divine rule," *potestas Dei gratia*),¹⁸ the separation of nation and state heralded a new conceptual framework of political organization. This has meant an understanding of the sovereign state as *community of citizens* (πολίτες, *cives* [plural]), organized by law, whereby the respective community may consist of individuals with different "national"¹⁹ identities in terms of culture, language and ethnicity. Accordingly, it is important to distinguish between a *uniform* nation-state and a *diverse* "multicultural community state."²⁰ There exists a lot of confusion about the concepts of "state" and "nation." The terms have become synonymous in modern English (particularly American) terminology.²¹ (However, a certain differentiation was made between the notions in some of history's multi-ethnic and multicultural empires such as the Habsburg Monarchy.²²)

The development towards this conceptual distinction is essentially owed to *economic interests*, initially in the context of *colonization* and, subsequently, in the 20th century, of *globalization*. The dynamic of worldwide economic exchange, powered by rapid technological advances, created new social realities and, accordingly, organizational necessities. These have been most obvious in numerous free-trade regimes and particularly in the enormous increase of labor migration in the industrialized world. Again, as with the earlier emergence of the nation-state, a *leap in technology* triggered the change towards a *post-nation-state reality*.

This has not mean the end of the *sovereign* state as such. The state, whether uniform or diverse in its demographic composition, will always be the focal point of the exercise of popular will at the domestic and global level. Under the circumstances of today, the meaning of "nation-state" is more appropriately expressed in the concept of the "sovereign state."²³

Especially since the second half of the 20th century, after World War II, the erosion of the traditional state system has appeared to become irreversible. Previously culturally *homogenous*

¹⁸ On the separation of church and state in contemporary Europe cf. Köchler, "Das Verhältnis von Religion und Politik in Österreich und Europa: Die Idee des säkularen Staates," in: Forum Politische Bildung (ed.), *Informationen zur Politischen Bildung*, No. 37 (2013): "Religion und Politik." Innsbruck / Vienna / Bozen: Studien-Verlag, 2013, pp. 5-17.

¹⁹ As earlier explained, we use the term in the sense of the German word *Kulturnation*. Cf. also note 15 above.

²⁰ For details see Köchler, "The Concept of the Nation and the Question of Nationalism."

²¹ This is also the case with the confusion between "citizenship" and "nationality."

²² Whatever the underlying motives may have been, Austrian Emperors, in the late years of the Monarchy, addressed their solemn proclamations related to matters of the Empire in its entirety, "An meine Völker!" ("To my peoples!" [plural]; not, "To my people!" [singular]). (The British Library, in the respective archival entry, wrongly translates the phrase in the singular: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/to-my-people-emperor-franz-joseph>.) – On the underlying supranational conception of the state cf. Claudio Magris, *Der habsburgische Mythos in der modernen österreichischen Literatur*. Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1966.

²³ For details see the author's analysis, "Sovereignty, Law and Democracy versus Power Politics."

nation-states have gradually become culturally *diverse*. The new status quo has meant the presence of ever larger communities with different "national" (ethnic, cultural) identities on the territory of the same state. A case in point is the steady increase of the Turkish migrant population in Germany since the 1960s.²⁴ Under these circumstances, social stability – and the viability of the constitutional and political order – can only be ensured if a clear distinction is made between nationality (in the sense of cultural identity, i.e. *Kulturnation*) and citizenship (defining the general legal status of a person on the territory of a given state). In regard to the immigrant population, this also requires a precise distinction between assimilation (to the prevalent culture) and integration (into the state system, as citizen).²⁵

Undoubtedly and undeniably, the separation of the notions of nationality and citizenship changes the perception of the state – and of the position of the individual in the state – in a basic sense. It also implies a new understanding of "community" at different levels of identification: A person may be member of a cultural group (national minority), which, in turn, is constituent part of the state community of citizens – whereby the latter is *neutral* not only vis-à-vis religious identity, but also nationality. The distinction between *cultural identity* (as member of a nationality, national group) and *political-legal identity* or affiliation (as citizen of a sovereign state) is absolutely essential for the modern understanding of the rule of law (*Rechtsstaat*). Again, similarly to the equivocation of "nation" and "state,"²⁶ there is a problem with modern English (American) terminology where, unlike as e.g. in German, "nationality" and "citizenship" are used synonymously.²⁷

In the face of the increasingly *multicultural realities* of today and at all levels (local, regional and global), doing away with the ambiguity of these concepts and separating "nation" and "state" will make *peaceful co-existence* easier. This will allow that no one is artificially

²⁴ For an early assessment of the implications for the labour market and the state's social and political system in general see the speech of Josef Stingl, President of the German Labour Office, at the international meeting of experts on "Arbeitskräftefluktuation im Alpenraum" (Manpower Turnover in the Alpine Region): *Ausländische Arbeitnehmer in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Wissenschaft und Politik an der Universität Innsbruck, 12 October 1973, at <http://hanskoechler.com/AWP-Stingl-Arbeitskraeftefluktuation-12-10-1973.pdf>.

²⁵ For an analysis in regard to Turkish labour migration to Germany cf. the author's speech, "Migration – Integration – Partizipation", chapter "Siyaset ve Göç," in: *Almanya ve Göç: 50. Yılında Almanya'da Türkler Sempozyumu. Sempozyum, 1-2 Kasım 2011, Berlin*. Ankara: T. C. Başbakanlık / Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı, 2012, pp. 101-104.

²⁶ See note 20 above.

²⁷ In our terminology, used in this text, "nationality" (related to ethnic and cultural identity) is distinguished from "citizenship" (related to a person's legal status in a given state).

subjected to an identity that is not his/her own – while all enjoy equal rights as citizens of the state. In this sense, the state embodies the sovereign status of *all* its citizens – as ("nationally" neutral) *commonwealth of citizens*. This also implies that no one will be forced under a yoke of "nationhood" in the sense of *Kulturnation*.²⁸ State citizenship is one and the same *for all*, irrespective of each citizen's distinct cultural (national) identity. This is also what respect for *diversity* means in conformity with the modern interpretation of human rights.

In such a constitutional framework, the risk of *ghettoization* (of national groups as so-called sub-cultures) is relatively minor in comparison with social tensions and political instability in a context where everyone is expected to assume an *imaginary*, not merely imagined, national identity that may not be his/her own, but is based on a totally different cultural narrative or history.

IV

Transformation of cultural identity in the global context: The virtual nation

What does the "disentanglement" of nation and state mean in today's global era? Distinct national identities realize themselves in an *open space* within and beyond the confines of the traditional nation-state. This relates to:

- 1) the multicultural reality at the *intra-state* (domestic) level (in terms of interaction between different cultural communities [nationalities] as constituent parts of the respective polity and on the basis of *equality* and *mutuality*), and
- 2) the multicultural reality at the *inter-state*, and ultimately global, level. This dynamic reality is the result of:
 - (a) constant exposure of *each* community to influences from the entire globe (not only from within the particular state or region where the community is situated) and

²⁸ There exists no adequate English translation of this German term. In the context of this article, it does not mean "nation with a great cultural history" (*Langenscheidt German-English Dictionary*), but, more neutrally, "nation" as common denominator of a cultural community, as expression of its identity.

- (b) the interlinking of groups with the same cultural (national) identity in other sovereign states. This is the specific trans-national²⁹ dimension of today's multicultural reality.

The developments described here are heralding the emergence of the *virtual nation* at the global level. "Nation" is not anymore exclusively defined on the basis of territoriality. A community's identity is shaped by constant interaction and competition with other national identities beyond borders. Similar to earlier historical developments, the dynamic of this interaction and interdependence is greatly intensified, or enhanced, due to technological developments, in particular in the field of information and communication. Unlike in the era of the classical nation-state where communities were largely shielded from outside influence – or could live in splendid isolation, so to speak –, in the global era, collective identities realize themselves in the simultaneous presence of each other. *Simultaneity* has become a new feature of the dialectics of cultural self-comprehension, an important structuring principle of identity in today's globalized environment.³⁰

Cultural identity is not any more a *static* reality, its structure is similar to what we observe in the *dynamic* of consciousness in the philosophy of Fichte.³¹ Due to the interaction, indeed a permanent encounter, with other identities, each community is able to continually enrich its perception of the world, to more precisely define its value system and, ultimately, become more aware of itself. Thus, *mutuality* is another important principle of cultural self-comprehension.³² In this sense, "trans-cultural" hermeneutics has become an essential aspect of international relations in the global era.

The disappearance of traditional limits and restrictions of communication in the interaction between sovereign states is posing new problems for which most states are ill-prepared. Because of globalization, what Samuel Huntington described as "clash between

²⁹ "National" in this composite term is to be understood in the sense of "state."

³⁰ Cf. Köchler, "The Philosophy and Politics of Dialogue," in: Johanna Seibt and Jesper Garsdal (eds.), *How is Global Dialogue Possible?* Berlin / Boston / Munich: de Gruyter, 2015, pp. 267-281.

³¹ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794/1795), § 1-3. For details see Köchler, *Die Subjekt-Objekt-Dialektik in der transzendentalen Phänomenologie: Das Seinsproblem zwischen Idealismus und Realismus*. Meisenheim a.G.: Anton Hain, 1974. – On the "dialectics of cultural self-comprehension" cf. also the author's analysis, "The Philosophical Foundations of Civilizational Dialogue," in: *World Order: Vision and Reality*, pp. 369ff.

³² On the notion of "self-comprehension" in relation to culture see also Köchler (ed.), *Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations*. Studies in International Relations, Vol. I. Tübingen: Erdmann, 1978.

civilizations"³³ has become a major risk also at the *domestic* level. The problem results from a potential *incompatibility* of cultural identities, and their value systems, co-existing on the territory of the same sovereign state. Interaction or dialogue among distinct and geographically distant cultures and civilizations is one thing; their co-existence in the local neighborhood – "under the same roof" – is an entirely different matter.

What can be the vision for the future under conditions of inter-cultural alienation and conflict, domestically as well as globally? Is there a way for a "creative" (necessarily non-hostile) development of cultural identity? A conceptually precise and politically consistent *disentangling of nation and state*, as suggested above, may offer a novel chance for self-realization of the multitude of cultural identities hitherto "enclosed" within the borders of the traditional nation-state. An example of such a post-nation-state identity is how Italian culture has been able to position itself in the global context. It is specifically referred to in terms of *Italicità* (as distinct from *Italianità*) – a "life-world," or perception of the world, through the Italian experience, not merely within the confines of the delimited territory of a state (the Italian Republic), and at a given point in time, but *diachronically* as well as *globally* (internationally).³⁴ Similar transnational experiences in today's context are those of the *Francophonie* or the *Hispanic community*.

Due to the development of technology – mainly in the fields of transportation, information and communication – a dynamic constellation of complex and constant interaction between "virtual nations" has unfolded at the global level. This also has led to new forms of "hybrid" civilizations. Structurally, the situation at the beginning of the 21st century appears similar to that in the era before the emergence of the modern nation-state. There exists a novel kind of *commonwealth of civilizations and cultures* (representing humankind) in the virtual space of the "global village"³⁵ – a realm beyond all geographical borders. This "commonwealth" is juxtaposed to a *multitude of sovereign states* as legal-political actors. Conventionally, though

³³ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

³⁴ For details cf. Piero Bassetti and Paolo Janni (eds.), *Italic Identity in Pluralistic Contexts: Toward the Development of Intercultural Competencies*. Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series IV, West Europe, Vol. 6. Washington DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2004.

³⁵ Marshall McLuhan coined the term in his seminal work (1964), *Understanding Media: The extensions of man*. London / New York: Routledge Classics, 2001.

misleadingly, the latter are referred to as "United Nations."³⁶ In most cases, these legal entities – polities – are multi-cultural or multi-civilizational in the very composition of their societies.

In spite of the enormous potential of the "virtual nation" – in the sense of emancipation of cultural identity (*Kultur*nation) from the particularities and limitations of the nation-state –, one cannot deny the importance of a "country of reference" for each of those identities. This relates (1) to *tradition*, i.e. the origin of each cultural identity; it includes what, in Gadamerian hermeneutics, is described as *Wirkungsgeschichte* ("reception history" of ideas).³⁷ It also relates (2) to the *geopolitical position*, the actual power potential, of the respective state of reference. What Joseph Nye characterized as "soft power"³⁸ cannot be completely, or artificially, separated from the realities of a state's "hard power."

There appears to be a complex *interdependence* between both aspects in the global commonwealth of civilizations: On the one hand, the "virtual nation" draws its legitimacy from the *history* of the respective nation-state, and also from that state's actual *power*. Having acquired a life of its own in the global domain, it may, on the other hand, also have an impact on, or strengthen the position of, the respective sovereign state (the state of reference). This applies to *Italicità* in regard to *Repubblica Italiana* as it does to *Francophonie* in relation to *République française*, to give only two examples.

Thus, in the course of globalization, a new form and shape of cultural identity has evolved, which is expressed in a complex interplay of two factors, *globus & locus*. The dynamic lies in the interaction of a (virtual) nation beyond borders ("globus") with the nation of reference within the borders of the respective sovereign state ("locus").

³⁶ A more adequate term would be "United States of the World." The UN Charter is somewhat semantically inconsistent or ambiguous. It describes "states" as members of the "United Nations" and, in the Preamble, refers to the "peoples" of the United Nations. In referring to the preparatory body, the Charter mentions, in Art. 3, the "United Nations Conference on International Organization," which was an intergovernmental undertaking of sovereign states upon the end of World War II. It is obvious that the introductory phrase of the Preamble, "We the Peoples of the United Nations," refers to the citizens of the member states, not to the diverse ethnic or cultural communities of the world.

³⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik I: Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 7th ed. 2010, pp. 305ff: "Das Prinzip der Wirkungsgeschichte."

³⁸ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

V

Dialectics of diversity and uniformity in the commonwealth of civilizations

The above-described developments have undoubtedly strengthened cultural and civilizational diversity within and between states. This is what we earlier characterized as the aspect of *simultaneity*.³⁹ At the same time, globalization carries the risk of uniformity, and for the very same reasons that have enabled diversity: The world has become an open, virtually unlimited, space of exchange and competition in all domains – where a balance of power (whether in the sense of "hard" or "soft" power) is not always a guaranteed outcome.

In the interdependence, and mutual reinforcement, of the *virtual* (global) and *state-related* manifestations of cultural identity is indeed inherent a *tendency towards uniformity*. The "free flow" of information and communication has brought about a constant fluctuation and imbalance in the assertion and projection of identities. The particular cultural identity that is attached to the most powerful actors in the global interplay of forces may, whether intentionally or not, superimpose itself upon other cultural identities, in their domestic as well as global (virtual) dimension.

A case in point – since the second half of the 20th century – is the de facto civilizational hegemony of the United States and, connected to it, the English cultural commonwealth. All across our global village, the threat to diversity has become visible in the phenomenon that is commonly referred to as *Westernization* (or, more specifically, Americanization). The dominant culture (more generally, in terms of the West: civilization) serves as the informal standard-bearer, or "trendsetter," for a multitude of cultural identities *inside* and *outside* of the Western world, shaping and reshaping distinct cultural life-worlds⁴⁰ in regard to some of the most important and common aspects of our perception of reality, whether in the fields of social values, esthetics or life-styles, including fashion, entertainment, and food. One of the decisive factors of this remolding of identities has been the influence of the English language. Modifying the earlier-quoted phrase about the role of Latin in another era, one may now say: *lingua Anglica omnia vincit*. The most vivid illustration of this development in Europe is the fate of the *Concours*

³⁹ Global Dialogue Conference 2009: "Responsibility Across Borders? Climate Change as Challenge for Intercultural Inquiry on Values." Aarhus University, Denmark, 6 November 2009. – Köchler, "The Philosophy and Politics of Dialogue," pp. 272ff.

⁴⁰ We use the term as defined and developed in Husserlian phenomenology. Cf. note 6 above.

Eurovision de la chanson (Eurovision Song Contest / ESC). What was a celebration of diversity (in terms of musical style and the variety of European languages) when it was inaugurated in Lugano, Switzerland, in 1956, has by now largely become a display of Anglo-American uniformity, a pop show with songs almost exclusively performed in English.

English has indeed become the *lingua franca of globality*. This is not due to some *intrinsic* quality of the respective culture. It is, more or less, the *accidental* result of the power, almost imperial role, of the "state of reference" (namely the United States, since 1945). In that regard, the constellation is not much different from what one has witnessed in earlier epochs in terms of the influence of the Greek or Latin language.

Due to the preponderance of the "English commonwealth" (not to be confused with the British Commonwealth), backed up by the technological strength and political, economic and military power of one particular state, we now witness a *reverse trend* as compared to the development analyzed by Benedict Anderson. The effects are particularly obvious in Europe. While, in the post-Enlightenment period, the continent's vernacular languages gradually emancipated themselves from the dominance of Latin, those languages – that became the nucleus of national identities and, subsequently, the nation-states – are receding again into a quasi-vernacular status vis-à-vis the dominant English language, similar to the fate of the above-mentioned ESC in the field of entertainment. This may lead to an impoverishment of the affected languages as regards terminology and grammatical as well as semantical sophistication. Scholarly research and discourses are increasingly conducted in English. The dominant language's concepts are more and more getting integrated into the respective "local" languages, and these "anglicisms" further shape perceptions of the world and social attitudes.

One notices an interesting effect of this development on the German language, if I may speak for a moment about my native tongue. Because it is less used for intellectual endeavors and scholarly purposes, the skills of speaking, pronouncing, and writing in High German are remarkably degrading. This is accompanied by a more frequent resort to local dialects *within* German, now again a kind of "vernacular" language at the global level, marginalized by the new *lingua franca*.⁴¹ The less frequent use of the high language – *desuetudo* – not only in the realm of scholarship, but increasingly also in everyday life, has meant a considerable loss of refinement,

⁴¹ The trend is obvious even in the philosophical domain where, in the 1960s, German was still an international language. It is not the case anymore. Now, even literature on Heidegger – in spite of its de facto untranslatability – is frequently written in English.

and in particular a simplification – or trivialization – in terms of literature and the skills of people to write poetry. Problems may be similar in other languages, though to different degrees.

In conclusion: How should we evaluate, and react to, the undeniable threat to diversity at the global level? Four maxims – or imperatives – come to mind:

- 1) Each civilizational/cultural collective – as *Kulturnation* in the global space – should adopt a *proactive*, instead of a merely reactive, approach towards participation in the worldwide interchange of ideas, social perceptions and value systems as equal partner.
- 2) Collective identities, as embodied in cultures and civilizations, should seek to gradually free themselves from the confines and constraints of the nation-state. They must avoid falling victim to an artificial kind of exclusivism, which has often meant passivity and a false cultural nostalgia or fascination with one's own uniqueness or indispensability. A *constructive* approach, positioning one's community on the global marketplace – or ἀγορά – of ideas, also appears to be the intention behind the emphasis on *Italicità* in distinction from *Italianità*.⁴²
- 3) The juxtaposition – or simultaneous existence – of civilizational/cultural diversity at the local and global levels must not be allowed to lead to perpetual confrontation and conflict. Thus, it has become even more important to detach cultural identity issues from those of the nation-state with its narrowly defined interests.
- 4) Transformation of collective identities in today's global context – or "commonwealth of civilizations" – ultimately means that each *Kulturnation* (as virtual nation) must be prepared to constantly explain and, at the same time, assert and reassert itself in the face of all other such communities. Even more so than in earlier epochs, *cross-fertilization* of cultures will be an unintended consequence. One may also use the term “hybridization” to describe this dynamic process of cultural and civilizational identity. Through all of history, civilizations flourished and achieved their highest state through interaction with other civilizations.⁴³

⁴² Cf. the proceedings of the international conference jointly organized by *globus et locus* and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations at the United Nations in New York on 13 November 2017: *Italics as a Global Commonwealth*. Ed. Davide Cadeddu. Torino: Giappichelli Editore, 2018.

⁴³ Cf. Amy Chua, *Day of Empire: How Hyperpowers Rise to Global Dominance – and Why They Fail*. New York: Doubleday, 2007.

What the hermeneutics of civilizational identity will mean in the long term, especially in a context of global power politics, with an increasingly aggressive assertion of national interests by sovereign states, cannot really be predicted: namely, to what extent, and in what shape, new civilizations will emerge from the infinitely complex global interaction of collective identities – or whether diversity will ultimately give way to a kind of hybrid global civilization. As everything in history, the civilizational effort is an open-ended project.
