

# Globalisation and Identity

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In recent decades two parallel processes have coexisted at a world level: globalisation, on the one hand, and the reaffirmation of different cultural identities, on the other. Both processes are inter-related, as the cultural homogenisation which is usually linked to globalisation involves a threat to local cultures, to specific identities. Thus the fear emerges of losing the cultural references that define people and hence the conflicts and demands around local or regional identities. In this dual process the policies of the nation-states, which in many cases govern distinct identities in the same state framework, have had much to do. So that the nation-state does not become a “failed state”, a civilising endeavour is necessary that legitimises these identities.

In the first place, I would like to thank the European Institute of the Mediterranean for enabling me to set out the results of my research and my theory about the relation between globalisation and identity, which I approach mainly as a problem of institutional and political relations. Allow me to point out the content of the article before developing it in detail: based on empirical experience, we have observed that in the last fifteen years, the development of the globalisation process has coexisted with a reaffirmation of different cultural identities: religious, national, ethnic, territorial, gendered and other specific identities.

The two processes are taking place at the same time. In my view, it is not simply a historical coincidence but rather there is a systemic relation. This, in principle, is not so obvious, because at some point the idea emerges that globalisation also requires a global, cosmopolitan culture, and in this point different perspectives arise: on the one hand, that which speaks

of unification, the cultural homogenisation of the world as a criticism of this process; on the other, the idea that particularisms, and in some ideologies also historical identity atavisms, will be overcome in order to fuse in a kind of undifferentiated universal culture in which we will culturally accept ourselves as a single culture linked to the human species.

Thus, both in positive and negative aspects, both in the vision of a search for a new universalistic culture above identity values and in the fear of an imposition of a cultural homogenisation which is sometimes called, I believe wrongly, Americanisation, in both senses, the idea is that specific identities ended and that these are historical atavisms. This statement, linked to globalisation, to economic development, in the end is nothing more than a continuation of what have been the two major rationalisms on which the contemporary world is culturally and ideologically founded: liberal rationalism and Marxist rationalism. The two are based on the rejection of the historical, religious or ethnic

construction of identities in order to affirm the prevalence of a new ideal: that of the world citizen or the *Homo Sovieticus*, with different types of relation but overcoming any distinction considered artificial, ideological, manipulated, and so on. I emphasise this because at present it is the prevailing ideology in our society and, above all, in Europe. It is the rationalist ideology in the dual liberal and Marxist approach. It is an ideology which considers that identities are a suspicious, dangerous and, probably, fundamentalist discourse: whether religious, national or ethnic.

It is empirically proven – we have many sources developed in different surveys over time in university fields – that there is a persistence of identities and culturally constructed identities as a fundamental element of meaning for people. The main source of this data is the World Values Survey, mainly promoted by Professor Ronald Inglehart, from the University of Michigan, which for a long time has proven both the persistence and transformation of these identities.

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As a preamble, I would like to refer to data analysed by Professor Pipa Norris, from Harvard University, using information from the World Values Survey on the comparison between identities in the world, national, regional or local field and on the comparison of these identities with the cosmopolitan identities or human gender identities in general. In the data corresponding to the two waves of analysis in the early and late 1990s, Pipa Norris estimates that at a worldwide level, the percentage of those who consider themselves primarily world citizens, i.e. cosmopolitan, is 13%; that of those who consider themselves primarily of

a national identity understood as nation-state is 38%, and the remaining – therefore, the first majority – consider themselves first as a local or regional identity. In this database, Catalonia or the Basque Country appear as a regional identity. Moreover, when it is broken down by world geographic areas, the area where the primary regional identity is highest – reaching 61% of all identities – is in fact Southern Europe. This is only one example that illustrates the need to first start from this observation: the persistence of the strength of these identities. However, we must also start from something more than the combination of a globalisation in which the processes of generation of power, wealth and information are global, and from an identity in which the processes of construction of meanings are specific to cultures and identities. These two processes have in their turn led to the crisis of the nation-state constituted during the Modern Era as a subject of institutional operation of societies, and the crisis of the nation-state as an efficient tool for the management of problems.

Problems are global, they are not managed from the national sphere, and a crisis of the capacity of representation of a world of cultural plurality arises provided there is a structuring of this state around plural principles which are a source of identity. This is the issue I would like to examine in depth here, but I believe that it is always useful to know where we are heading before starting to set out on a relatively complex path.

In the first place, let us start with the easiest and recall that globalisation is not an ideology but rather an objective structuring process of the whole of the economy, societies, institutions and cultures and, specifically, let us start by recalling that “globalisation” does not mean that everything is an undifferentiated set of processes. We are speaking of globalisation, for instance, in economics, to refer to a type of economy which has the capacity to operate as a

unit in real time on a daily basis. In other words, that the economy is global but not all of the economy is global, that this economy has the capacity to work according to its core activities. What are these core activities? The capital, the financial markets. Financial markets are inter-dependently global, either in market economies or capitalist economies if the capital is global. The economy at its core is global. It is interdependent and it is global in international trade, which occupies an increasingly central and decisive place in worldwide economies; it is global in the production of goods and services, but not everything is global, only the core of the economy is global. By way of illustration, the labour force is mostly not global. Multinational companies and their auxiliary networks only employ around two hundred million workers. This seems a lot, but in fact, compared with a world labour force of three thousand million, it is nothing. However, these two hundred million in these fifty-three thousand multinational companies account for 40% of the gross world product and two thirds of international trade. Thus, what happens in this production system conditions all economies.

Science and technology, the basis of the growth of wealth and military power and also of states and countries, are global; they are globally structured. They are science and technology networks which are constituted worldwide with more or less important nodes, but they are global networks. Communication is primordially global. Global in the financial and technological controls of communication. Seven major communication groups control the production of 50% of the audiovisual material or news broadcast. This does not mean that the whole culture of this media is globalised. No, what happens is both a globalisation process of the business and management of information, although specified and localised in each culture. To cite an example, Murdoch produces American soap operas according to the Ameri-

can classical models, but the Sky Channel in England adapts to the British tradition. Sky in India produces in Hindi in North India and in Tamil in Madras and with local characters; and Sky in South China produces in Cantonese and with local stories. In contrast, in Beijing and in North China it does so in Mandarin and with different stories. In other words, the formula, the business, the strategy is one of global communication, the relation is obviously with specific cultures, identities, because otherwise nobody would sell, nobody would disseminate their information.

*Global warming and the mechanisms to avoid it are a global common good and, therefore, all the environmental treaties and devices for environmental control are global public goods*

To a certain extent, therefore, the idea is that this globalisation process has existed and that, moreover, it has developed in a set of international institutions that represent an increasingly important role in the management of problems. The notion of global public goods requiring a global management such as the environment, for instance, has been developed. Although the Bush Administration has said that it does not believe in the reports of experts, they are unanimous in stating that global warming exists. What we still do not know is how much, how and when, but we do know that such a warning does exist. Global warming and the mechanisms to avoid it are a global common good and, therefore, all the environmental treaties and devices for environmental control are global public goods. Human rights that move the International Criminal Court are also values that are globally, universally, signed.

If someone had any doubt of the existence of an interrelation of health problems in the world, the Acute Respiratory Syndrome epi-

demic after AIDS reminds us to what extent we are living on a planet where, if poor people get sick, rich people also get sick. Canada protested because it was included in the list of polluted countries and it said “I am rich” but the answer was “yes, but you are also polluted.” So, apart from the UN internal policy on the issue, what seems clear is that the relation of interdependence goes beyond what was simply the relation between nations and countries. This globalisation has a technological infrastructure that is not the cause of globalisation. The causes of globalisation are economic strategies, cultural developments and the creation of markets. These are the main causes, but without this technological infrastructure they would not have existed. In other words, the financial capital has always been global: it can transfer thousands of millions of euros in just a few seconds from one investment to another, and this capacity of communication and construction of information systems is technological and current. For this reason, the current globalisation is not the same as previous globalisations, because it is based on communication and information technologies enabling the removal of distances between countries. Moreover, we know that this globalisation is, at the same time, inclusive and exclusive. Inclusive in everything which has value and exclusive of what does not. Thus, the strictly economic globalisation is a selective globalisation. This is why the states, governments and businesses of each country try to position themselves in this global network; because outside it there is no growth, there is no development, there is no wealth. If there is no possibility of an investment of financial capital or technology in a country, that country – or region or sector of population – is marginalised from the global economy. Thus, from that point of view, globalisation has an inclusive and exclusive logic, and we are not in a North-South opposition but rather an opposition of who is in the network against who is not. Of course in

the so-called North there is a greater proportion of people and activities in the network, but also in the South there are centres in this network unlinked from their own societies. And this type of exclusive globalisation has recently been challenged by public opinion. What happens in this type of globalisation? The main sectors of many societies are left aside from this process of globalisation, while others benefit from it extraordinarily. It cannot be stated that globalisation is as a whole negative or positive. It depends on when, where, how and for whom it is assessed, because sometimes it can be positive in the economic fields but negative in the environmental, for instance. Nevertheless, in any case, what has happened is that the states, in order to manage globalisation and intervene in it, are those who have really encouraged it. It is not true that multinational companies are the globalisers. From the empirical perspective, the globalisers have been the nation-states, which have liberalised and deregulated, while there was the technological structure to develop that globalisation. In other words, the globalisation of capital or international trade does not only depend on the existence of technology or business strategy to globalise: it depends on the nation-state to really liberalise, deregulate, privatise and remove frontiers. And this is what they have done.

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To a certain extent, all states have been the main agents of liberalisation and globalisation; and, in doing so, have somewhat distanced themselves from what was their historical basis of representation and political legitimisation. An example of this is the European Union. Europe has had to organise as a European Union to have some relevance in a world concert in

which not even the USA had or has the capacity of economic control; it has more than others, but it does not have the total capacity of control because nobody controls the global financial markets, or nobody controls the investments and strategies at the core of multinational companies. The European Union has constituted itself as a state that I call network-state, as a new form of state in which the relation with the institutional political management depends on national governments, governments of the nation-state that are more or less working together, that negotiate constantly, that share sovereignty so as to maintain a certain level of autonomy with respect to global networks of capital, technology, international trade, the media, and so on. In the second place, they have created a super structure of international institutions, both of European institutions and institutions of another kind: NATO, the World Health Organization, the Environmental Treaty; a series of international institutions. At the same time, in order to slow down the crisis of legitimacy that nation-states have experienced we also observe worldwide, but particularly in the European Union, an effort of decentralisation towards sub-national states in the sense of nation-state, towards historical nationalities, towards regions, towards localities and even towards non-governmental organisations. Then, the real state structure we are experiencing in Europe – and we could analyse it in other parts of the world because it is similar – is not the nation-state as the core of all things but the node, the nation-state as a node of a network which is supranational, a nation-infra-state and at the same time a nation-co-state.

Within this network political decisions are taken, negotiations are carried out and management is undertaken. In this way, nation-states have not disappeared in globalisation but, in order to survive, they had to surrender sovereignty, and something more important: they had to distance themselves a degree more from

the political representation system of which they form part. Their citizens must accept not only that what is happening in a village or a region is not the same as what is happening in the whole of the state, but also that there is a global management logic in the nation-state. Thus, the representation mechanism is much more distant. Let us remember the slogan of the wrongly named anti-globalisation movement, as it does not call itself this anymore. The slogan under which the first big demonstration in Seattle against the World Trade Organization was held was very precise: “No to Globalisation without Representation.” In fact, it was mimetic to the slogan with which the American Revolution started: “No Taxation without Representation.” If you think about it, from a technical perspective, it is clearly incorrect because the World Trade Organization is not the multinationals, but rather the states; it is the states, and the governments are clearly represented, although some of them have not been democratically elected.

*Between what I have at home and the representation level that the world economic policy finally decides, the real representation mechanism is lost*

What does this type of reaction mean? It means that, between what I have at home and the representation level that the world economic policy finally decides, the real representation mechanism is lost. Hence there appear, on the one hand, radical trends that state that there is no such mechanism and, on the other, serious trends that state that other kinds of representation mechanisms are needed. Thus, the principle of reconstruction of a political model of management is achieved by losing a certain capacity of legitimisation and political representation. However, while there is this globalisation, this reaction of the state and, therefore, this distance between the state and

its representatives, there is also a growing concentration of the collective behaviour of people in terms of their identities. Why? Because insofar as they feel like orphans of the state as an instrument of representation and meaning, insofar as they cannot cling onto the state institutions as an element of construction of their lives, then they tend to reconstruct their meaning based on what they historically are. And it is here where we see identity appear and emerge.

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Identity is a reconstruction of the meaning of the life of people when what they had as a form of aggregation, of organisation – which in the Modern Era was mainly the state – is lost. The market is not enough to provide meaning. The state becomes to a certain extent an agent of globalisation rather than of a particular collective, and the reaction is the alternative construction of meaning based on identity. Let me recall what we understand by identity because, in effect, it is a word to which many meanings can be attached. Generally, in social sciences, identity is considered to be that process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute enabling people to find meaning in what they do in their life. Through a process of individuation they feel what they are, they have a meaning because they refer to something more than themselves; they refer to a cultural construct. But we must be careful as that cultural construct can be individual. Individualism is a form of identity. There is a form of identity that can be illustrated by the following phrase: “I am the beginning and the end of all things” or “My family and I are the beginning and the end of all things.” This is a form of identity, but generally the identities to

which we refer are identities constructed with the materials of history. Here, the metaphysical discussion between sociologists, social scientists and anthropologists tries to clarify whether identities are constructed or not. In my view, I believe they are clearly constructed. I do not know any cultural form which has not been constructed. But constructed... with what? Not with what I arbitrarily decide: today I wake up in the morning and I decide to be a Hutu, for instance. I can decide it, although it is very complicated to decide to be a Hutu. Here the play of postmodernist theories appears in which everything is possible, all identities are invented. In other words, to be Muslim or to be Catalan, to be a woman or to be from Barcelona... forms part of the same homogenisation in which everything is constructed.

Everything is constructed with the materials of personal experience, and that personal experience has a density, a historical, cultural, linguistic and territorial thickness. But how is an identity constructed? Who constructs it? For what is it constructed? Who can identify with it? It is in this material process of identity construction where the problems begin and where it is necessary to make the analysis more precise. In my theory, I have tried to distinguish three types of identities that I have empirically observed as collective identities. In the first place, we have what I call “legitimising identity”, that which is constructed from the institutions and in particular from the state. For example, and without wishing to provoke, the French national identity, which is one of the strongest in Europe, is constructed from the French state. It is the French state which constructs the French nation, not the reverse. At the time of the French Revolution less than 13% of the current French territories spoke the language of the Île-de-France. I would say that it is the only European national identity which was efficiently constructed from the state. It was fundamentally constructed, first through

repression, like all entities constructed from the state, but there was repression in many other places and it did not work very well. There was something decisive, which was the school of the Third Republic, the school of Jules Ferry, which really constructed the *petit citoyen français* as a cultural model. In contrast to the French case, the other great revolutionary nation, the American nation, constructed a strong national identity in which there were no traditional identity principles, and it did so based on the state and the Constitution and through the key elements of multiculturalism and multiethnicity.

The second type of identity is what I call “identity of resistance”. It is that identity in which a human collective that feels either culturally rejected or socially or politically marginalised reacts by constructing with the materials of its history forms of self-identification, enabling it to confront what would be its assimilation into a system in which its situation would be structurally subordinated. We can speak of national identity, but to express at that moment the extraordinary emergence of indigenous movements throughout Latin America. It is an identity which was asleep and which had not expressed itself with all the strength with which it is expressing itself now. And the cause is that it is structured as a resistance to the marginalisation process in which the globalisation of a certain kind places them. Not all globalisation generates resistance, but globalisation does make certain social groups resist, and they resist with what they have because they cannot do so as citizens, because as citizens they are minorities that do not have their rights represented.

The third type of identity that I have observed is what I call “project identity”. The project identity is structured based on a self-identification, always with cultural, historical and territorial materials. And although it is always with these materials, there is a project

of construction of a collective and at that moment it can be a project of a national, generic, kind; for instance, the feminist or the ecologist movement as a project of construction of a citizenship of the rights of nature.

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These three types of identities are fundamentally different and it would be a mistake to believe that it is easy to pass from one to another. For example, it is not that clear that we can move from an identity of resistance to a project identity. And, if this does not take place, then identities close up in themselves. Legitimising identities become ideological manipulations. If the project of construction of nation based on the state is simply the interest of the state, this means that those who do not agree with the process existing in the state are marginalised. If the identities of resistance do not open up, do not establish project and communication bridges, they may become fundamentalisms; not necessarily but they can. If the project identities are not embodied in constructed historical materials, they become merely subjective projects that can only be assimilated with difficulty by a sector of society. Then, how is what we have seen recently set out empirically? Instead of examining all the possible cases, let me simply focus on two types of identities: religious identity and national identity.

Religious identity in Western Europe – I would say in Europe in general – has very little importance today. Our studies in Catalonia show that less than 5% of the Catalan population has a habitual religious practice. This does not mean that religion is not important in the general cultural collective; it means that it is not

the principle of identity on which the meaning of life of the vast majority is structured. However, if many European intellectuals insist on this and despise religious identity, it is simply through ignorance, because in the rest of the world it is extremely important, beginning with the USA; and obviously in the Mediterranean Islamic world it is the fundamental identity. Therefore, religious identity is an identity which in principle basically differs from state legitimacy. The principle of state legitimacy as a state citizen is completely different from the principle of the believer as a member of a believing community. Specifically referring to the Islamic world, the serious project of construction of the Arab state goes against the Islamic principle of the *umma*. The *umma* is a community of believers which, by definition, is not expressed in the state. The state is only part of the principle of legitimacy insofar as it becomes Islamic and represents the interests of God through the state. Then there are other more or less fundamentalist derivations. But nationalism is the enemy of the *umma* and, for this reason, when Saddam Hussein took power with the support of the USA – of the USA and some from France, but mainly the USA – he could defend Iraq, a fundamental strategic point, from Islamism; and as soon as Saddam Hussein was eliminated, with the extreme Arab nationalism that he represented, Islamism appeared, which is the substrate of those that exist and existed in the Iraqi society. Shiites above all, but also the Sunnis, agree with these kinds of principles; in fact, Saddam Hussein was the deadly enemy not only of Shiites but of the whole of Islamism. Thus, insofar as the nation-states have proved to be incapable of managing globalisation, and at the same time there has been a failure of Arab nationalism with respect to Israel and globalisation in general, and as Arab nationalism or nationalism in other places of the Islamic world sinks, the reconstruction of meaning outside the state has emerged, which

is religious reconstruction; with the possibility that if this construction is not a project construction but a community construction enclosed as resistance, then it moves, as we are seeing, towards fundamentalism.

*Globalisation is glimpsed both as a loss of autonomy in terms of the power of the state and as invasion of foreigners of a culture which resists assimilation*

The national construction, as we have seen in the Modern Era, was based on the construction of the nation-state, generally on the basis of the state rather than on the basis of nation. It was the state which created the nation rather than the nation the state in most cases. What are we seeing today? The separation between the state and the nation. What we are seeing when talking of values is that national values and those of the state are different. Those of the state are instrumental and, beyond the nation-state framework, are values to manage globalisation, the global management networks; while they are affirmed as identity values. Nations excluded from the process of generating their own state – Catalonia, Scotland, Quebec – but also those which generated a strong nation – France – are at this moment feeling lost in globalisation, which is glimpsed both as a loss of autonomy in terms of the power of the state and as invasion of foreigners of a culture which resists assimilation. In 2004 we witnessed the development of the policy of fear in Europe, the fear of globalisation and the fear of the foreigner as a form of expression of a nation which saw itself betrayed by the state, and this has led to the revival of a broad extremist ideological range which has garnered many votes; such as the case of the French or Dutch extreme right.

In this way, the nationalist reaction separated from the state has different political versions. Thus, the idea of the reconstruction of

the state upon the basis of the nation questions the identity of that nation. In the case of Spain – and without entering into controversies, simply analytically –, when President José María Aznar suggests the idea of a project of Spain as an important country in the world while explicitly rejecting the idea of a multicultural society, upon invoking the principle of a unicultural Spanish nation, he is overtly attempting to construct a nation on the basis of a cultural and national unity that does not currently exist in Spain; moreover, that is not even recognised in the Spanish Constitution.

*As soon as the state is deprived of an identity force that supports its difficult manoeuvre in the world of globalisation it seeks to re-legitimise itself calling again on its nation*

Thus, what is put forward here? A project of reconstruction in the name of the nation when in effect it is in the name of the state. It is a nationalist project of the state rather than a nationalist project based on a nation. It is very important to keep this in mind, not only because of the concrete explanations in Spain but as a more general principle in the world, so I will conclude now. The idea is that as soon as the state is deprived of an identity force that supports its difficult manoeuvre in the world of globalisation, that state seeks to re-legitimise itself calling again on its people, i.e., its nation; but that nation, in many cases, has already distanced itself from the state and believes that it is not being represented.

Latin America is a dramatic case in this respect, because we must not forget the nations, the states, which are constructed on multinational realities, such as the case of the Spanish state. Naming the Spanish nation in unitary terms means, in the end, challenging the multinationality on which the construction of a consensus state was based. These kinds of

derivations have a state character, an identity character and a globalising nature. That is, three sides of a triangle which do not meet.

The instrumental processes of power and global wealth, the institutions, a nation-state which no longer represents the nation and the identities constructed with autonomous principles are the elements of the management crisis that our world is experiencing at present. And when the states – and above all those who are more powerful – find themselves in crisis, they are incapable of controlling processes which overwhelm them, such as the USA on 11th September 2001. Then they resort to what was always the *raison d'être* of the state: the legitimate capacity of the monopoly of violence in Max Weber's analysis. In other words, they resort to the capacity of coercion, to violence, and this becomes the fundamental principle in a world in which for the last ten years there have been all kinds of experiments of combination between states and of creation of forms of world co-management and co-sovereignty, in which at the same time there were plural identities, complicated bridges of relations between global public goods and nation-state institutions. All this complexity in a moment of panic, in a moment of defence, disappears, and we go back to the principle of the political-military capacity of imposing the will of a state. It is the policy of fear at a global level, not only at a national level. Hence, then, something similar to what we are experiencing appears: structurally, the evolution of the world moves, on the one hand, towards complexity, plurality, interdependence, but if there are powerful agents who decide, although the world is following a direction of its own, to impose theirs, in the long term there can be profound changes; let us remember the relation between structure and agency. There is the structure that creates the framework in which problems take place; however, the agency is what finally prevails.

The agent does not understand the structure. Georges W. Bush decides that although there is globalisation and cultural plurality, he will make his own decisions completely on the margin of structure. What Bush and other powerful countries are doing is to generate a different trajectory. There may be Internet, there may be globalisation, there may be interdependence and there may be cultural plurality, but if on one side there is censorship, military power and technology at the service of the military, this unilateral dynamic generates quite a different world: the lack of correspondence between the economic, cultural and institutional structures and the political instruments provokes chaos.

*The lack of correspondence between the economic, cultural and institutional structures and the political instruments provokes chaos*

The Azores Meeting brought together four major western Christian empires – or their remains –, conveying the message that the world was very dangerous, very complicated, and that it had to be simplified by reducing it to a model of civilisation which can be obviously proved as the best, as the most desirable and, in any case, ours; and as we have the capacity to impose it, we will do so. One: the world will be more controllable because it is we who control it. Two: it will be a better world for all because our civilisation is superior. This is the imperial logic. The imperial logic does not mean stealing gold in the past or oil now. This is, let's say, a

plus: the empire must be funded in some way; but the imperial logic is to think that our civilising work is right and that violence is justified to save people from their own misery.

The great concept that the American political science has currently coined is that of the “failed state”. Failed states are those whose governments are incapable of relating with their citizens, managing the planet, managing the resources. In a small meeting of experts, a renowned American political scientist directly suggested that as there were many failed states which, apart from housing terrorists, had the capacity to control the most important natural resources on the planet, it was necessary to create a trust controlled by western countries to manage the world's natural resources to the benefit of their inhabitants and the planet in general, because they would do it better. In other words, the civilising aim is, in the end, an aim of legitimising identity based on the power of the state. This legitimising identity is today faced with identities of resistance that are appearing throughout the world as trenches, with identities of being something particular when this something particular is not necessarily the most extraordinary. Between the two, the capacity of identity of resistance – and, specifically, national identity – to become a project identity that puts forward something with which all the members of a society can identify – not only in the past, but in the future – is the only thing that can save the world from living among power apparatuses and fundamentalist communes.