NATION-STATE, POWER AND IDENTITY

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1. The decline of the Nation-State

In 1989, a date that has a symbolic worldwide and trans-cultural relevance, the political history of the world suddenly ceased to be dominated by the planetary contrast between the liberal-democratic West under US control and the communist bloc under Soviet control. Indeed, in that year the fall of the Berlin wall came to be considered the symbol of the slow implosion of the worldwide communist system and definitely marked its end as an economic, political and cultural system representing an alternative to the Western one. The communist political hypothesis proved to be substantially unfeasible, from a structural viewpoint as a social and economic organizational system as well as an ideal place where identity could be built up on the level of collective and individual imagery. The sworn enemy of the United States and Western Europe had surrendered, swept away by himself and by his failure to hold up the mediatic, cultural and industrial comparison with the liberal and consumerist societies, those sustaining a high rate of technological innovation. The end of the merciless, disciplinary and organizational communist logic brought about any consequences, since it caused the clear emergence of the still on-going crisis of the liberal-democratic modern State[2], which contrasted with it. As if it had come out of a micro fifty-year-long ice age, human civilization found itself in the presence of powerful telluric and titanic forces[3], which were re-set in motion by the end of the chilly balance, which was expressed by the concept of *cold war*, as a metaphor for a permanent conflict. Since it could not realize in an out-and-out nuclear war, which would have threatened human species survival, the conflict had moved on to another level, turning into a bitter struggle on the political, technological, mediatic and economic planes, having an impact

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[2] See P. Barcellona, *Il declino dello stato. Riflessioni di fine secolo sulla crisi del progetto moderno,* Dedalo, Bari, 1998.

[3] See E. Jünger, *Al muro del tempo,* It. trans. by A. La Rocca and A. Grieco, Adelphi, Milano, 2000.

on all sectors of real life. Thus the sudden political implosion of the Soviet bloc did not only cause the end of a menace, but also the complete release of capitalism's financial, political and globalising logics, which have since then spread all over the world.

One such release brought – and still brings – about a global order, which not only extends capitalism and its related functioning rules to the whole globe, but also undermines the European Nation-State[4] (in the following Nation-State), which is the result of Modern Age and, in particular, of 19th-century political logics. On the other hand, the Nation-State comes from two complementary necessities typical of modern age: the State is the form taken on by power, while nation is the identity which constitutes itself within that territory on which the State exercises its sovereignty. The two elements, as will be attempted to highlight here, must be comprehended in their unity, as faces of the same medal expressing its political and cultural aspects. The State, which entered modern political lexicon with this specific connotation thanks to the paradigmatic and leading contribution of Machiavelli[5]'s *The Prince[6]*, is a pillar of Modern Age political condition. Alternatively interpreted along a contractualistic slant as in Hobbes[7] and Locke[8], an organicistic angle as in Hegel[9], or a legal-formal viewpoint as in Kelsen[10], it represents the exercise of sovereignty over a people and a territory. But this State, meant as a self-governing political entity and author of the history of the world, finds itself in extremely bad condition, since it proves to be an inadequate tool for the new reticular order wrapping the planet. In other publications[11] we tackled

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[4] See M. Hardt – A. Negri, *Impero/Il nuovo ordine della globalizzazione*, It. trans. by A. Pandolfi, Rizzoli, Milano, 2002. See M. Hardt – A. Negri, *Empire,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2000.

[5] «…since from the first sentence of *The Prince*, the term State (*Stato*) has unequivocally the political-national-territorial meaning (subjective + objective are therefore blended together) of the strict modern technique…» (A. Passerin D'Entrèves, *La dottrina dello Stato*, Giappichelli, 1967, p. 52).

[6] «All states, all powers, that have held and hold rule over men have been and are either republics or principalities» (N. Machiavelli, *The Prince,* trans. by T. K. Marriott, Waking Lion Press, West Valley City, UT, 2006, p. 1).

[7] See T. Hobbes, *Of the causes, generation and definition of a commonwealth* in *Leviathan*, Penguin Books, Baltimore, 1968.

[8] See J. Locke, *On the beginning of political societies,* in *The second treatise on civil government,* Prometheus Books, New York, N. Y., 1986, pp. 54-69.

[9] See. G. W. F. Hegel, *The State* in *Outlines of the philosophy of right,* trans. by T. M. Knox, Oxford University Press, New York, N. Y., 2008, pp. 228-315.

[10] See H. Kelsen, *General theory of law & state,* Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, N.J., 2006.

[11] See P. Bellini, *Identité européenne, pouvoir politique et globalisation*, METABASIS.IT (on line), An III – numero 5, 2008. (www.metabasis.it).

those morphological-structural aspects of the Nation-State's crisis specifically connected with the advent of globalization and the reticular order emanating from it. Here, instead, we intend to carry out a more in-depth analysis of those aspects linked to consensus building within the dynamics expressing the dialectic relation between power and legitimization. The liberal modern States' legal-institutional status *de jure* provides for the division of power into its three fundamental aspects, according to the renowned Montesquieuian formula[12], that is legal, executive and judicial. Such division, in turn, is specifically declined in each State, considered from a practical point of view, depending on its peculiar rules and regulations. For instance there can be parliamentary republics as Italy, in which the executive power (government) is approved by the legislative one (Parliament is directly elected by the people) upon proposal of the President of the Republic (who is in turn elected by Parliament through a qualified majority voting), by appealing to a vote of confidence[13]. But there can also be presidential systems as the U.S.A's[14], in which Parliament and the executive power separately depend on the will of the people and do not substantially depend on each other, since they cannot reciprocally pass a no-confidence motion in themselves[15] (the President cannot dissolve the Chambers, and the Congress cannot pass a vote of no confidence in the President, though it can substitute him for impeachment, that is in case he is accused of unlawful activity). As the aforementioned well points out, and this counts for all liberal-democratic States, appealing to the will of the people is fundamental to confer legitimacy to political power. Though within the limits required by each Constitution, which aims to safeguard each individual's rights (freedom, life, propriety and *habeas corpus*) and to supply the usual guaranties for minorities, the real Authority, as a source of power legitimization, lies in the people exercising it through individual vote. There is, however, a natural circularity tying power to the people as legitimizing authority. If, indeed, power needs to be legitimatized by the people, likewise the latter cannot do

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[12] See. C. L. de Montesquieu, *De la Constitution d'Angleterre in L'esprit des lois,* Flammarion, Paris, 1979, Livre I, pp. 294-304. See. C. L. de Montesquieu, *On the constitution of England,* in *The spirit of the laws*, edited by A M. Cohler, B. C. Miller, H. S. Stone, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989.

[13] See *Costituzione italiana*.

[14] Though putting themselves forward as a federation of States since their origins, the United States of America, constituted themselves on a federal level and in each single State according to the principles typical of the liberal-democratic project, reproducing with little variations on a Municipal, Statal and Federal level the same political-administrative architecture.

[15] See *The Constitution of the United States*.

without power to be as such[16]. Taking up a famous definition by Cicero, it can be stated that: «… a people is not any group of men, assembled in any way, but an assemblage of some size associated with one other through agreement on law (*iuris consensu*)[17] and community of interest (*utilitatis communione*)[18]»[19]. Now, when drawing on justice (meant as legal order consensus) and community of interest (meant as agreement on a whole series of aims collectively pursued to common interest advantage), as essential elements to define the people, distinguishing it from any mere group of assembled men, also the concept of identity is clearly – although indirectly – hinted at. Indeed, *iuris consensu* and *utilitatis communione* are to be intended – by the typically Latin legal mentality – as transfers of a collective identity, though virtually to be built up on diverse bases depending on one's own historical and cultural context – which necessarily characterizes a people. Both when meaning the strong concept of *Volk*, intended as an ethnic cultural and linguistic unity, and when referring to the weaker definition of nation as citizenship in a contractualistic sense, based on individual acceptance and acknowledgment of a legal, mutual and binding pact, the people is such only if it possesses an identity. Strictly speaking, furthermore, as far as Modern Age is concerned, it would be proper to speak of nation-people[20], hinting at the continuous overlapping of ethnic and legal factors, which have characterized the history of modern Western civilization and that lie at the basis of the concept of Nation-State.

2. People, identity and power.

Within such a framework, two fundamental concepts can be highlighted: people and identity. People is, as it was attempted to show earlier, an assemblage of men endowed with collective identity, which can be meant either as *iuris consensu* and *utilitatis communione* or ethnic, linguistic and cultural belonging. In both cases it is necessary to understand where such identity derives from.

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[16] See P. Bellini, *Caos e potere: dinamica di un conflitto*, in METABASIS.it (online), An I – Numéro 1, 2006 (www.metabasis.it).

[17] Our parentheses.

[18] Our parentheses.

[17] Cicero, *On the commonwealth,* in *On the commonwealth and On the laws*, edited by J. E. G. Zetzel, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, N. Y., Melbourne, 1999, p. 18, (Book I, 39a).

[20] See *Nation, Peuple,* in *Dictionnaire de Philosophie politique*, sous la direction de P. Raynaud et S. Rials, P. U. F., Paris, 1996, pp. 461-463 et pp. 411-415.

Here power comes into play, as primary datum and coessential to human species existence. Indeed, taking up the famous Aristotelian definition, it can be stated that man is a political animal[21] , better still a *techno-political* animal, since he can exist in a state of nature because he associates with his own kind and produces – as maintained by Plato[22] – those techniques necessary to compensate for his physical lacks. Thus technique and politics have always belonged to human species, qualifying man as an intelligent and gregarious animal[23], in that his existence as a species would come to an end, exactly if he did not associate with his own kind and would not develop techniques. The association and the development of techniques to survive necessarily imply an asymmetrical relation between individuals, that thus place themselves within a more or less developed chain of command (which can be of diverse linear, reticular, etc. nature), where they set themselves according to specific hierarchies, either because they exert a leadership or because they own some form of knowledge that is to be preserved and implemented on a collective level. This is where any form of power, even in its embryonic stage, comes from. One such uneven dimension, that power identifies, since it is needed for the species survival, though it does not totally use up its complexity, cannot but be original and precede identity as a cultural construction. Or rather, the latter depends, in an individual and collective sense, both on one's role within the social hierarchy[24], and on the modalities through which power takes upon itself to tell and/or state its own origin and the origin of the community which he contributes to determine as far as identity is concerned[25]. The function and its representation alongside the myth of origins, constituted as they are within the hierarchy and the asymmetrical order expressing them, represent identity itself, which proves to be substantially unthinkable without power. In particular, complex societies, thanks to the existence of diverse institutions and organizations (University, school, healthcare system, political parties, etc.) as well as of the media, produce that identitary lowest common denominator allowing to individually recognize oneself within a common identity. This is accomplished through political power, which

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[21] See Aristotle, *Politics*, in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes,* trans. by H. Rackham, Harvard University Press Cambridge, MA; William Heinemann Ltd., London, 1944. Vol. 21, 1253a.

[22] See Plato, *Protagoras*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. by W.R.M. Lamb., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA; William Heinemann Ltd., London, 1967, Vol. 3.

[23] See F. Nietzsche, *The joyful wisdom*, trans. by T. Common, The Macmillian Company, New York N.Y., 1924, p. 160.

[24] See G. Dumezil, *Mythe et épopée*, Gallimard, Paris, 1995.

directly or indirectly exerts its own control. This identity, in turn, breaks down in the sense of belonging to a set of values, traditions, languages, religions etc., which make each people different from others. Thus, to name just a few examples, we speak of a Christian Europe because in 313 A.D. the Roman Emperor Constantine decided to put an end to the persecution of Christians through the Edict of Milan and also because his successors (Theodosius I, Gratian and Valerian) made Christianity (in the version established after the 325 A.D. Council of Nicaea) the official religion of the Roman Empire, prohibiting Aryanism and heathen cults. Many an example could be added here up, and one more than others, expressed by the famous sentence by Massimo D'Azeglio *Abbiamo fatto l'Italia, ora si tratta di fare gli italiani,* clearly conveys this idea. Indeed, the Italian language remarkably begins to be understood and spoken by everybody only after the advent of television. As it was clearly shown earlier, identity depends on power to some extent, which makes a people as such through it, that is to say able to differ from a mere assemblage of human beings and capable of developing autonomous cultural forms to express its own specificity. However, we do not want to affirm that power is omnipotent, rather we only would like to say that any discourse on identity cannot but be connected with it. Power indeed reveals itself as an original datum. Also new identities, which come to life as opposed to constituted power, identify an asymmetrical order of their own, thus nonetheless referring to some form of power, even though of a different nature from the one they intend to fight against. Even anarchic doctrines, substantially impracticable as doctrines negating every hierarchy and every asymmetrical order, as an everlasting challenge to each constituted power, theorize it (power) as object of their specific interest, then making it collapse within the individual, which becomes their centre of emanation and legitimization[26]. It is thus possible to state, in general, that people, power and identity make up a set of complex concepts mutually dependant, based on power, which represents the necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the existence of identity, on which the concept of people is based and consequently develops.

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[25] See. Op. cit.

[26] See *Anarchisme,* in *Dictionnaire de philosophie politique,* op. cit., pp. 8-12.

3. The legitimization crisis of the Nation-State

Such premises thus allow to deal more specifically with the topic of legitimization, of consensus building and of their crisis within the modern state form. This is based on a mechanism whose structure is extremely simple, though complex in the way it is declined. As highlighted earlier, power generally determines identity, but, provided that it constitutes its foundation, it cannot do without it, since identity allows each constituted power to exist in a stable way, with no need to continually turn to force. We mean that identity is indissolubly bound to Authority[27], which legitimizes power for those who are subordinated to it. In other words, if power is coessential to human nature, its stability as a constituted form is not as much. Indeed, power always presupposes a certain degree of widespread consensus and an agreement to a given value system, which allow to regulate the individuals' relations (in a horizontal sense) and legitimize the asymmetry necessarily determined between governors and governed (in a vertical sense) by each power. To do so, any type and nature of constituted power must necessarily adopt an authoritative dimension, that is a myth or some narrative form that can found it, giving it stability. Such myth or original narration lies at the basis of the identitary value system from which it more or less coherently derives and that power takes upon itself to spread on a collective level (within a society or a community). Otherwise, only brutal exercise and arbitrary force, meant as a coercive command and as a continuous appeal to violence, would remain. However, even if such force were well organized within a complex legal and very efficient repressive system, it could not much resist with regard to the necessities of those who are submitted to it. Indeed no society or community is based or has never been based, in the long run, exclusively and only on the exercise of force, rather founding itself on a set of shared values and on the consensual legitimization of power itself. How can in fact an absolute monarchy last without a people that really thinks that the person of the king is inviolable and that his power directly derives from a divine will? Or how can a modern parliamentary democracy be considered as such without a people deeming itself sovereign? A power, therefore, with no legitimizing foundation, would rapidly surrender, being unable to cope with the mass numeric force that it itself claims to govern with the only use of force and law[28]. Easy and blindingly obvious evidence for this

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[27] See P. Bellini, *Autorità e potere. Dagli incubi di Prometeo ai sogni di Artù*, Franco Angeli. Milano, 2001.

[28] See A. Passerin D'Entrèves, *La dottrina dello Stato*, op. cit.

is exactly the way power organizes its stability and existence within the technological civilization through novel forms of mediatic legitimization that are gradually making the modern state machine obsolete and dissolving the related nation-people. If, in fact, it is extremely clear that globalization inevitably tends to compress the degree of political and economic freedom of the Nation-State[29], it is not as much clear what happens on the level of the collective imagery[30] as far as the legitimizing and identitary dimension connected with it is concerned. Collective imagery and power, as primary polarities of human existence, are in a constant dialectical relationship. Imagery, as power, indeed originally belongs to man, as a symbolic and techno-political animal, and represents the modality through which he has always conferred meaning to reality[31]. Thus power, by calling upon Authority (mythical-symbolic, legitimizing narration) as its own source of inspiration, contributes to the creation of specific identitary imageries. And here the legitimization crisis of the Nation-State dramatically unfolds. In particular, if, as it was highlighted earlier, the Nation-State's power is founded on the concept of sovereignty and if a people is such only through the identity it takes on, then it is necessary to shed some light on the nature of sovereign people's identity itself, which legitimizes power. One such identity, within the technological civilization, is socially built up through institutions and media production, which represent the two fundamental poles of implementation related to consensus building and to the creation of a value system collectively shared. The Nation-State, in turn, can and does exert a more or less direct control on the institutional dimension, by guiding its contents, in particular with regard to University and public

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[29] See. J. Rifkin, *Network commerce in a Globalized economy*, in *The European dream,* Polity Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 181-196; M. Hardt – A. Negri, *Empire*, op. cit.

[30] «First of all a **production of images** that points to the use of imaginative representations of ideas or men in public life and that contribute to their efficacy… Then an **imagery**, strictly speaking as creation of unreal objects, of entirely invented psychic contents, that is with no correspondence with any verifiable, observable empirical data. The story of the sacred origin of authority, the theatrical staging that the charisma of a leader can guarantee, the invocation of a society of equals with insurrectional aims, presuppose believes and narrations without any objective foundation, nor experimental assessment, but they have a spiritual slant, *as* if they appointed real facts…. Finally, **immaginal** representations, in the sense in which the immaginal identifies primordial, universal images, that do not only depend on the subjective conditions of that who realizes them and adhere to them, but assert themselves to his spirit as autonomous mental realities, noetic facts. The imaginal, a term imposed by diverse philosophies of imagination, thus sums up archetypical representations, symbolic prototypes that have no real equivalent, but that play a psychic or intellectual role, since they have the function of giving sense and conferring value». (J. J. Wunenburger, *Imaginaires du politique,* Ellipses, Paris, 2001, p. 79).

[31] See G. Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire: introduction à l'archétypologie générale,* Paris, Dunod, 1984.

education. On the contrary, it competes, both on the mediatic and the value levels, with other non state forms of power as corporations, pressure and ethnic groups according to their own hierarchies, that direct a large part of mass spectacular production, pursuing aims and discursive strategies often conflictual as compared to the state dimension. Thus such forms of power partially lying outside and competing with the Nation-State reduce its centrality in an economic and political sense and likewise compress its influence on the symbolic and identitary level. Here, it is worth highlighting how extremely different identities, which fragment the sovereign people in a kaleidoscopic, often conflictual whole of groups, are gradually developing. Cinema, television, web and institutions combine to produce a complex set of very different imageries, in which individuals and social groups fluctuate, from time to time identifying themselves with images, dreams and figures, which structure their identity. With regard to such kaleidoscopic, symbolic bundling, there emerges a complex and chaotic set of groups subdued by the new mediatic totems, of which they are legitimate children. Thus a sovereign people, with its own linguistic, cultural and value unity, summed up, within the liberal-democratic conception, by the image of the 18th-century-like good citizen, does not exist anymore. It is nonetheless possible to observe the emergence of many more or less structured groups, little virtual peoples as the mediatic representations consumed through the screen. To this, one must add, then, the effective migratory phenomenon, which brings entire ethnic groups within cultural contexts which are alien to them from a linguistic, religious and value viewpoint. The Nation-State is slowly, but inexorably, losing the national element, which shatters in a complex set of groups and identities in reciprocal conflict. In this sense, it turns into a neutral administrative machine *de jure*, though *de facto* submitted to dominant pressure groups' interests, which influence the administration and the legal production, as it happens in the U.S.A.[32] from a long time. The Nation-State therefore turns into a legal machine-State and this apparently seems to admit that Kelsen, who conceives it as such[33], is right. However, this transformation into a purely legal-formal, virtual object, does not save its existence, but throws it into a profound crisis of substantial legitimization. Such machine, indeed, as typical of any modern state form, does not limit

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[32]See *Lobby e gruppi di pressione negli Stati Uniti d'America*, edited by F. Spicciariello http://facolta.unipg.it/giurisprudenza/Documenti/seminari/seminari-cattedra-diritto-amministrativo-M-Z/LobbyUSA210409.pdf, 2010.

[33] See H. Kelsen, *General theory of law & state,* op.cit.

itself governing, but it also produces the same laws and rights valid for everyone, regardless of the identitary group of belonging. This cannot but give rise to substantially incurable conflicts, in which hegemonic groups oppose and will oppose minority groups, which badly stand rules and value systems with no relevance to them, and which may cause the dissolution of the machine itself. In case this legal-formal machine renounced such an enterprise, permitting the existence of different rights and laws within itself depending on the group of belonging, by endeavouring to establish a sort of *ius gentium*[34] capable of regulating inter-ethnic relations, it would cease to be a State, thus turning into something similar to an imperial structure, whose nature is necessarily conflictual with the idea of a legal-formal machine, neutral as for its content. Two examples seem very representative. On the one hand France, which, in the name of laicity, that is of its traditional identity as a Nation-State, bans the display of religious symbols in schools and public high schools[35]; on the other the UK, which allows Islamic and Jewish courts – under consensus of the parties – to judge on some issues concerning family law, drawing inspiration from the Koran or the Mosaic law[36]. In both cases the crisis of the Nation-State is revealed: in the first case, by imposing the hegemonic group's identity – in those places it directly controls – to the rest of the people; in the second case, by renouncing, in a sector of civil life, to have a unique law equal for everyone and, indirectly, because of that peculiar legal system that is the *Sharia*, to equality between men and women. In such a context, then, power, which has to manage the remains of the Nation-State, more and more tends to build consensus. This is based on society itself's identitary fragmentation and it also depends on the disappearance of the nation as a cohesive identitary whole.

4. Charismatic leaderships

From this fragmentary whole of identities, charismatic leaderships thus emerge[37] as an answer to the identity crisis of the nation. Such phenomenon evidently comes not as new; indeed there were many more or less similar fortunate cases throughout history. The novelty lies in the peculiarity of the

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[34] See *Ius gentium* in *Dizionario giuridico romano,* intr. by A. Guarino, Simone, Napoli, 2006.

[35] See *Article L141-5-1, Loi n°2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 - art. 1 JORF 17 mars 2004 en vigueur le 1er septembre 2004.*

[36] See «Londra, fra moglie e marito decide la *Sharia*», Corriere della Sera, 15/09/2008 and *Arbitration Act,* 1996.

political language catering for consensus building in support of a specific political figure and in the fact that such leadership does not express the unity of the nation-people within the State by referring to one concept only. This was for instance the case of fascism (people's unity based on its traditional idealistic-romantic idea), of nationalsocialismus (people's unity based on the idea of the Aryan race) or of communism (people's unity based on the concept of proletariat). Otherwise, the leadership is either ethnic, that is to say it expresses the claims made by a specific group within the State, or it is prismatic, that is to say it manifests itself as a polymorphic, mediatic leadership, without a specific ideology of its own, though able to draw consensus from often conflictual groups, as the cases of Berlusconi and Obama distinctly highlight. The first kind of leadership aims to re-construct Nation-States that can be defined as traditional, since they are like small homelands founded on a supposed linguistic and cultural unity, though practically unfeasible. The rhetoric of the Italian Northern League, for example, well accounts for it. This, on the one hand, claims Northern Italy peoples' cultural diversity as opposed to the rest of the country, swinging between federalism and secessionism; on the other, it is in fact compelled to cope with a multiethnic territory, where autochthonous elements are gradually disappearing. The second, more recent kind of leadership relies on the leader's mediatic body[38], which never expresses a clear and definite identitary position, but reflects all those present in a specific territorial and cultural context by means of a clever communicative strategy making it a proper virtual leader. In the rhetoric of this mediatic and virtual self-representation, the leader puts forward fragments of identity broken down in a religious, social and economic sense, which, through open, fluid and instable messages, allow each group to complete the message according to its own desires and foundative narrations. Therefore, a particular type of open narration combining myth and utopia in a skilled political alchemy[39] comes to light. On the one hand the critical moment, as a narration based on a very general set of values, usually rooted in a certain basic universalism, on the other the utopian projection as never ending, though always ameliorative, completion of the foundative narration

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[37] See M. Weber, *Charismatic authority* in *The theory of social and economic organization*, The Free Press, New York, N.Y., 1964.

[38] G. Parotto, *Sacra Officina. La simbolica religiosa di Silvio Berlusconi,* Franco Angeli, Milano, 2007.

[39] See P. Bellini, *Between myth and logos: The concept of Mythopia and Technological Civilization*, Caietele echinox, Numéro 17, 2009, pp. 199-209.

itself. This is the case of Obama, who reflects the multicultural and multiethnic American society[40] through his speeches and slogans. This example was not randomly selected, since the present President of the U.S.A. far more than other political leaders found and still finds himself to manage a federation of States that do not express a nation endowed with a unique identity, but a set of multifaceted identitary groups, characterized by an associationism that, since its origins, structures its political body[41]. Indeed, if on the one hand he has preached that it is necessary to march together toward the future as one nation and one people[42], an assertion that can suggest a unitary identitary rhetoric, nonetheless he has immediately considered such a nation and such a people in a prismatic sense, putting himself forward as a unifying element. In fact, by skilfully using the four symbolic elements proper of the foundative American myth (moral manichaeism, matriarchal idea of America, equalitarian myth and money cult)[43], has paved the way for an open narration in which each group could easily identity itself to turn out. The Americans, according to Obama, are good and represent the last hope for the earth in relation with the other people (all those living in America are American, regardless of their ethnic and cultural belonging); they express their values, though these are not clearly mentioned, before the president that listens to everybody on front porches and family farms (matriarcal idea of America evoking one's home); he (the President), in turn, democratically listens to them in church basements and town hall meetings (equalitarian myth, the future president listens to the values of all faiths and political opinions); finally, Obama states that taxes must not be squandered (as is well known, money *per se* has no identity, since it can virtually buy them all) [44]. Furthermore, the two main slogans in the election campaign, *Yes we can* and

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[40] See op. cit.

[41] A. Tocqueville, *The use Americans make of public associations in civil life*, in *Democracy in America,* trans. by G. Bevan, Penguin Classics, London, 2003, pp. 595-600.

[42] « … the only way to truly bring about the future we seek is if we are willing to work together as one nation and one people. That is our task in the months and years ahead, and I look forward to joining all of you in that effort» (B. Obama, *Change we can believe in: Barack Obama's plan to renew America's promise,* Three Rivers Press, New York, 2008, p.7).

[43] See J. J. Wunenburger, *Imaginaires du politique*, op. cit., pp. 95-99.

[44] «They are ready to come together and choose a new and better future for America. … I have a vision for America rooted in the values that have always made our nation the last best hope of Earth – values that have been expressed to me on front porches and family farms; in church basements and town hall meetings over the last eighteen months. The people I've met know that government can't solve all our problems, and they don't expect it to. They believe in personal responsibility, hard work and self reliance They don't like their tax dollars wasted» (B. Obama, *Change we can believe in: Barack Obama's plan to renew America's promise*, Three Rivers Press, New York, 2008, pp. 2-3).

Change we can believe in, are without object and liable to completion according to the identity of each group. Finally, during the 4 November 2008 speech following his astonishing election victory, he addresses the nation by listing the groups making it up in detail: «If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer. It's the answer told by lines that stretched around schools and churches in numbers this nation has never seen; by people who waited three hours and four hours, many for the very first time in their lives, because they believed that this time must be different; that their voice could be that difference. It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled - Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been a collection of Red States and Blue States: we are, and always will be, the United States of America»[45]. Later on, he lists the spiritual values which would make a nation out of all such groups: «Let us resist the temptation to fall back on the same partisanship and pettiness and immaturity that has poisoned our politics for so long. Let us remember that it was a man from this state who first carried the banner of the Republican Party to the White House - a party founded on the values of self-reliance, individual liberty, and national unity. Those are values we all share, and while the Democratic Party has won a great victory tonight, we do so with a measure of humility and determination to heal the divides that have held back our progress»[46] and, again, going back to the same basic values and addressing those who think that the American leadership is declining : « And to all those who have wondered if America's beacon still burns as bright - tonight we proved once more that the true strength of our nation comes not from our the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, but from the enduring power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity, and unyielding hope»[47]. Thus there emerges a generic appeal to: democracy, freedom, self-confidence, opportunity, hope and national unity. Such values, broken down in their generality as they are, can easily be recognized and endorsed by the numerous groups making up the American people. Indeed, in the always obsessively repeated slogan *Yes we*

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[45] *Barack Obama's US Election victory speech: full text* The telegraph.co.uk., 5 November 2008, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/barackobama/3383629/Barack-Obamas-US-Election-victory-speech-full-text.html (2010).

[46] *Ibidem*

can[48], as well as in the general style of the speech, President Obama (I) and the American people (We) ideally overlap, revealing that the real common identity is represented exactly by the leader's virtual body, by his mediatic double, which highlights U.S.A.'s cultural heterogeneity. Such virtual body tends, in turn, to detach itself from the real body, since it inevitably becomes the political body of the nation itself. The latter, as a consequence, does not recognize its real identity in the really abstract dimension of the foundative pact constituting the State, but in the leader's virtual body, which represents its hopes and future. Here comes out a utopian and performative feature, which is broken down in very general terms both when projecting the symbolic images constituting the American foundative myth toward the future, and when generically appealing to the construction of a new world based on the past experience, where peace, prosperity, justice, democracy and confidence in the scientific and technological progress reign[49].

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[47] *Ibidem*

[48] *Ibidem*

[49] «This election had many firsts and many stories that will be told for generations. But one that's on my mind tonight is about a woman who cast her ballot in Atlanta. She's a lot like the millions of others who stood in line to make their voice heard in this election except for one thing - Ann Nixon Cooper is 106 years old. She was born just a generation past slavery; a time when there were no cars on the road or planes in the sky; when someone like her couldn't vote for two reasons - because she was a woman and because of the color of her skin. And tonight, I think about all that she's seen throughout her century in America - the heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress; the times we were told that we can't, and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes we can. At a time when women's voices were silenced and their hopes dismissed, she lived to see them stand up and speak out and reach for the ballot. Yes we can. When there was despair in the dust bowl and depression across the land, she saw a nation conquer fear itself with a New Deal, new jobs and a new sense of common purpose. Yes we can. When the bombs fell on our harbor and tyranny threatened the world, she was there to witness a generation rise to greatness and a democracy was saved. Yes we can. She was there for the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma, and a preacher from Atlanta who told a people that "We Shall Overcome." Yes we can. A man touched down on the moon, a wall came down in Berlin, a world was connected by our own science and imagination. And this year, in this election, she touched her finger to a screen, and cast her vote, because after 106 years in America, through the best of times and the darkest of hours, she knows how America can change. Yes we can. America, we have come so far. We have seen so much. But there is so much more to do. So tonight, let us ask ourselves - if our children should live to see the next century; if my daughters should be so lucky to live as long as Ann Nixon Cooper, what change will they see? What progress will we have made? This is our chance to answer that call. This is our moment. This is our time - to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American Dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth - that out of many, we are one; that while we breathe, we hope, and where we are met with cynicism, and doubt, and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes We Can. Thank you, God bless you, and may God Bless the United States of America» (*Ibidem*).

Conclusions

This brief overview on the crisis of the Nation-State, on charismatic leadership, on political languages and on identity and power thus brings to light the image of a civilization hanging between the Nation-State (or at least its remains) and embryonic forms of multinational and multiethnic governance and legitimization. This shows our globalized world's double face in between desire and the claim by many little identitary (both virtually and actually) homelands and the idea of a potential para-imperial and virtualizing reunification of the technological civilization's political body, where legitimization is connected with the exhibition of a mediatic body embodying a wider project. This transcends both power personalization, in that the leader's mediatic body can survive his material body by serially re-embodying, and the State, meant as an administrative-legal machine, which becomes a mere means to assert an extended and reticular power. One such power can definitely establish, by means of charisma and the reign of spectacular images, a lowest common denominator holding the spread identitary fragmentation together. Is this the dawn of a new peaceful, prosperous world or an obscure, technological nightmare that can annihilate and enslave the entire mankind, reduced to individuals and groups without conscience and critical judgment? As Senecs maintained: *Ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt*[50].

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[50] Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales,* 107, 11.

MIMESIS

Sesto San Giovanni (MI)
via Monfalcone, 17/19