POSTMODERNISM, COSMOPOLITANISM AND NATIONALISM: RETHINKING THE SELF-OTHER BOUNDARY

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Abstract
Today’s world is increasingly being defined as a global village in the sense that the revolution in ICT has ensured the interconnectedness of the entire world in a way that leads to radical redefinitions of most of our cherished concepts and ideas. For instance, the ideas of the nation and of nationalism are daily being assaulted by what has come to be regarded as the “cosmopolitan imagination.” Cosmopolitanism insists that our beingness in the world should be reassessed given the fact of globalization and the deepening plurality that essentially undermines all forms of national consciousness and of the identity of the self too. Postmodern cosmopolitanism therefore questions the traditional definition of the self along territorial boundaries and ethnic lines. And this argument is reinforced by the economic imperative which Empire imposes on the entire globe, according to Hardt and Negri. In this essay, I argue that from cosmopolitanism’s and postmodernism’s ambivalent relationship with modernity, it seems too hasty to think that we are facing the erasure of nationalism and identities as we know it. In spite of postmodern cosmopolitanism, the discourse of identity is still a pertinent one, as fundamentalism, for instance, reveals. Thus, the modern subject, rather than being totally defined by a cosmopolitan imagination, is actually a self caught in a maelstrom defined around unity and fragmentation, of nationality and internationalization.

Keyword: Cosmopolitanism, Identity, Postmodernism, Nationality, Self, Globalization.
Introduction

In Empire, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri post a strong warning that can be taken as extending Lyotard’s notice of the postmodern condition of our world. According to them, given the increasing globalisation of the factors of production and exchange—good, capital, technology, people—especially across national boundaries, the world is gradually but steadily witnessing the effacement of the old order defined around national sovereignty. Thus:

Along with the global market and global circuits of production has emerged a global order, a new logic and structure of rule—in short, a new form of sovereignty.

Empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world.¹

This new global order—defined as ‘Empire’ rather than ‘Leviathan’—is postmodern in the sense that it is marked by an awesome deterritorialised and decentring effect that incorporates the entire world. Empire, for Hard and Negri, “manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command. The distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow.”²

The key words here are hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges. These terms not only determine a redefinition of the global economy but, more importantly, they constitute the emergence of a new imperial, rather than imperialist, form of sovereignty and indeed a postmodern reordering of life in its cultural, political, economic and social senses. The cosmopolitan idea is also fundamentally a serious challenge to the concepts of the nation-state and nationality. The “cosmopolitan imagination,” says Gerard Delanty, requires that we reassess our beingness in the contemporary global world. This reassessment is buoyed by the dynamics of globalisation, openness and plurality that postmodern scholars also gladly embrace. But it definitely disturbs national consciousness. “To speak of cosmopolitanism as real,” argues Delanty, “is thus to refer to these situations of immanent transcendence, and which we may term the cosmopolitan imagination,

¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), xi
² Hardt and Negri, Empire, xii-xiii
where the constitution of the social world is articulated through cultural models in which codifications of both Self and Other undergo transformation.”

With the idea of immanent transcendence in cosmopolitanism, we arrive, full cycle, back to the postmodern unsettling of the metanarratives and the totalising binary oppositions between the Self and the Other that lies at the heart of the construction of modern identities. *Empire* itself, in a critical sense, is a celebration of the postmodern concepts of delegitimation and dedifferentiation. However, both postmodernism and cosmopolitanism have a deeply ambivalent relationship with the concept of modernity itself. In this essay, I will critically examine these concepts and highlight the significant implications we can draw for our shifting ideas of the individual and the nation.

**Assaulting the grand narratives: From Lyotard to the postmodern polity**

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-Francois Lyotard commences with a solid hypothesis: the status of knowledge is altered as “societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age.” We are immediately therefore alerted to his curious entry point into his famous analysis of postmodernism—the analysis of scientific knowledge as the catalyst for the transition. Hence, Lyotard is reputed to have given the concept of postmodernism its first and most significant philosophical analysis. Before him, postmodernism has been a recurrent concept in the analysis of art and architecture.

The postmodern is variegated in so many difficult ways that ensures that summing up postmodernism becomes a huge theoretical agony. The first problem is to decide whether the postmodern is just a mood within the modern or a radical rupture from the latter. The second point of agony is the issue of an appropriate theoretical attitude to postmodernism. Steven Connor (2004: 6) identifies three possible

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attachments to the concept. The first is an all-out declaration and affection for all things postmodern. Lyotard is a significant representative of this attitude. The second attitude is that of ambivalence—there is a belief in postmodernism backstopped by an unwillingness to accept its implications. David Harvey exemplifies this attitude. The third theoretical attitude is that of total rejection, and Jürgen Habermas outlines such a rejection in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity.*

Connor suggests a genealogical and disciplinary distinction that enables further clarification. Genealogically, four different stages in the development of postmodernism are possible—accumulation (70s and early 80s), synthesis (the 80s and early 90s), autonomy (mid-90s) and dissipation (late 90s). Philosophy, on its own, represents a form of general framework that seems to sum up the postmodern attitude. While postmodernism in art signals the willing diversification into new cultural and artistic energies that are patently anti-modernist, and postmodern architecture marks a radical rejection and subtle transcendence of modernist architecture, postmodernism in philosophy represents a deep-seated sceptical attitude against modernism and modernity in its fundamental values. This sceptical temperament is conceived in terms of a gross suspicion against what is called *totality.*

Postmodernism, in summary, is a war on totality. And the idea of totality is emblematic of all intellectual and philosophical attempts to encompass the whole of reality; the total sums the boundary of the whole and the foundational. Totalization or totality, for Kosky, “is the historical progression towards the reconciliation or resolution of all opposition, strife, or discord by inclusion in an all-inclusive whole.”

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While the idea of totality, for instance in Hegel’s dialectics, conjures the progressive resolution of all historical contradictions and fragmentation until history arrives at self-realisation, postmodernists inject a pessimistic insight which supposedly sees beyond the emancipatory trajectory of totality to its inclusionary violence. In other words, difference is forced willy-nilly into the framework of the whole.

Lyotard’s postmodern project is therefore to be conceived as a philosophical rejection of “a totalizing understanding of the real.”9 The Postmodern Condition is ‘a report on knowledge’ in the postmodern society. Beginning from an unexpected premise, Lyotard’s postmodern argument is meant to highlight the trajectory of scientific knowledge from the Renaissance to the postmodern society, and how this knowledge became a discourse that narrates its own legitimation vis-à-vis other non-scientific narratives. In the postindustrial world, according to him, it makes sense to talk about ‘the mercantilisation of knowledge’ that derives from the fact not only that knowledge has ceased to be valuable in itself, but which fact also unleashes a stiff competition among the various knowledges available. Thus, since scientific knowledge is just one form of knowledge amongst others (i.e. narrative knowledge), the issue of legitimation automatically becomes that of power: Who decides what knowledge is? Scientific knowledge triumphed in this contest by producing its own legitimation that gave it an edge over other kinds of knowledge. For Lyotard:

Science has always been in conflict with narratives. Judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables. But to the extent that science does not restrict itself to stating useful regularities and seeks the truth, it is obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game. It then produces a discourse of legitimation with respect to its own status, a discourse called philosophy. I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the

hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth.\(^{10}\)

Unfortunately for scientific knowledge, Lyotard contends that in what is called the ‘postmodern condition,’ all these presiding grand or universal narratives that prop modern science have lost their relevance. With the undermining of these metanarratives, science was forced to lose its totalising and unifying function that initiated a ‘hierarchy of learning.’ In its place is “an immanent and, as it were, ‘flat’ network of areas of inquiry, the respective frontiers of which are in constant flux.”\(^{11}\) Postmodernism therefore, for Lyotard, represents our contemporary situation that is marked by ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’.\(^{12}\) In other words, after the process of delegitimation, postmodernism creates a paralogical rather than hierarchical framework that allows several local knowledges to flourish in parallel spaces.

Thus, Lyotard advocates the displacement of modern scientific rationality and all its presiding metanarratives. Instead of these universal totalising narratives, he insists that the postmodern condition is a celebration of a synchronic paralogy which allows for multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality and difference. Rather than the diachronic exuberance of the metanarratives and the assumptions of unity, totality, universality and identity, Lyotard sees a heterogeneous context that allows several competing ‘little narratives’ and knowledges to compete for innovation outside the constricting demand of truth or reality.

Postmodernism has serious implication not only for modern scientific knowledge and its triumphal rationality, but also for modern politics and political configurations. For instance, the nation comes in for a serious reassessment essentially because it serves as the modernist’s reference for identity. On the one hand, according to Lyotard, the state has a significant role to play in fixing the pre-eminence of scientific rationality over other narratives. For him,

Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major—perhaps the major—stake in the worldwide competition for power. It is conceivable that

\(^{10}\) Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiii

\(^{11}\) Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 39

\(^{12}\) Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiv
the nation-states will one day fight for control of information, just as they battled in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control of access to and exploitation of raw materials and cheap labor. A new field is opened for industrial and commercial strategies on the one hand, and political and military strategies on the other.\textsuperscript{13}

However, the nation-state also constitutes the locus of identity formation, especially in its often violent attempt at assimilating variant and unruly constituents to its notion of ‘proper citizenship’. The nation presents itself as a dominant and essential mode of cognition either of itself or of the Other. It does this through what Paul Gilroy calls the ‘rhetoric of order’.\textsuperscript{14} This refers to a homogeneous understanding of national belonging. As a specific form of identity, nations therefore become ‘culturally homogeneous “communities of sentiment” in which a sense of patriotic belonging can and should grow to become an important source of moral and political ideas’.\textsuperscript{15} This absolutism fixes the individual and national identity for all time.

So the postmodern battle-cry against the Enlightenment does not spare the nation-state. With mercantilisation, the stability of the nation-state receives its most serious challenge from ‘new forms of the circulation of capital’ i.e. multinational corporations.\textsuperscript{16}

The reopening of the world market, a return to vigorous economic competition, the breakdown of the hegemony of American capitalism, the decline of the socialist alternative, a probable opening of the Chinese market—these and many other factors are already, at the end of the 1970s, preparing States for a serious reappraisal of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{13} Lyotard, \textit{The Postmodern Condition}, 5
\bibitem{15} Gilroy, “The Whisper Wakes, the Shudder Plays,” 262
\bibitem{16} Lyotard, \textit{The Postmodern Condition}, 5
\end{thebibliography}
the role they have been accustomed to playing since the 1930s: that of guiding, or even directing investments.\(^\text{17}\)

Hardt and Negri took the postmodern agenda and the displacement of the nation-state to its logical conclusion in *Empire*. For them, modernity was defined by a two-dimensional conflict which coalesced around the idea of sovereignty. Modernity, in other words, evolved as a constant crisis between the forces of freedom or immanence and those of order or transcendence:

We identify three moments in the constitution of European modernity that articulates the initial figure of the modern concept of sovereignty: first, the revolutionary discovery of the plane of immanence; second, the reaction against these immanent forces and the crisis in the form of authority; and third, the partial and temporary resolution of this crisis in the formation of the modern state as a locus of sovereignty that transcends and mediates the plane of immanent forces.\(^\text{18}\)

The concepts of the nation and the nation-state were the historical heir of transcendence that was meant as a counterpoint to free subjectivities. The nation-state totalises its territory and population, and weeds out all conflicts and antagonism.\(^\text{19}\) To achieve its status as a form of modern sovereignty, Hardt and Negri sketched the trajectory of how the nation and nation-state evolved and stamped their imprimatur on modernity. The strategy is not only that the nation was constructed as being natural and hence prior to historical development, but it was also aligned to the idea of ‘the people’ to achieve a seemingly revolutionary connection. The French Revolution served as the historical point for the theoretical nexus.

However, for Hard and Negri, the idea of popular sovereignty is a ruse that is meant to draw the concept of the people into the mystifying origin of the idea of the nation. Once this is achieved, as it seems it was, the people are then further drawn into the subjugating orbit of the

\(^{17}\) Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 6
\(^{18}\) Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 70
\(^{19}\) Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 95
nation. The point of critique therefore, they contend, is to denaturalise the concepts of the nation and of the people. In other words, “Although ‘the people’ is posed as the original basis of the nation, the modern conception of the people is in fact a product of the nation-state, and survives only within its specific ideological context”.\(^{20}\) The nation, therefore, automatically creates a Manichean binary between Self and Other, white and black, inside and outside, good and bad, and ruler and ruled. If this assertion is granted, Hardt and Negri then asked that we differentiate between ‘the people’ and ‘the multitude.’ While the people’s identity is undifferentiated and racially exclusive, “The multitude is a multiplicity, a plane of singularities, an open set of relations, which is not homogeneous or identical with itself and bears an indistinct, inclusive relation to those outside of it”.\(^{21}\)

In modernity, every nation must turn the multitude into a people; in postmodernity, the multitude must reassert the revolutionary principle of immanence through a critical process of de-identification. And with de-identification, the nation-state breaks down in the blinding framework of global flows and the postmodern liberty that allows for differences across boundaries. The postmodern subject therefore is not a bounded subjectivity. We can even hypothesize that the postmodern subjectivity is properly garbed as a cosmopolitan subjectivity.

**Cosmopolitanism and the denial of national space**

From Diogenes the Cynic to the Stoics, we have the earliest statement of cosmopolitanism as the ‘citizenship of the world.’ Kosmopolitês translates into the reification of the polis to a global framework operating within the context of the universal logos and outside of the restricting boundaries of the nation-state. In this sense, the closed boundary of the modern subject as a rational and unified self with a central core of identity is opened up to radical destabilisation and re-inscription. Thus:

> Claude Levi-Strauss spoke of the death of man, arguing that deep structures worked through mankind, using it as a channel; Roland Barthes spoke of the death of the author as a controller of textual meaning (the reader

\(^{20}\) Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 102  
\(^{21}\) Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 103
becoming the key element instead); Michel Foucault spoke of the modern conception of the subject as something that could be erased quite easily, rather as marks made in the sand could be. For poststructuralists and postmodernists, the subject is a fragmented being who has no essential core of identity, and is to be regarded as a process in a continual state of dissolution rather than a fixed identity or self that endures unchanged over time. The old model of the subject is held by such thinkers to inhibit creativity and cultural change; as Deleuze and Guattari put it, ‘there is no fixed subject unless there is repression’.22

The cosmopolitan imagination, broadly conceived, “refers to both ethical commitments and political policies which embrace the whole world in their purview and which refuse to prioritize local, parochial or national concerns”.23 Cosmopolitanism is best sifted if one comes at it under two broad rubric—ethical and institutional cosmopolitanism. The former focuses on the moral standing of all human beings regardless of their nationality; the latter advocates a reconfiguration of the global political order into a framework that undermines and transcends the Westphalian structure of states. Both forms of cosmopolitanism coalesce around the idea of cosmopolitan citizenship: “A cosmopolitan is a citizen of the world. This stress on the notion of citizenship implies a commitment and responsibility extended towards all of the peoples of the world, and a readiness to express such a commitment through political action in the context of institutions with a global reach”.24

Salman Rushdie has a most graphic perspective of the cosmopolitan vision, or what he calls the ‘mongrelization of identity’:

23 Vandekerckhove, Wim and Hooft, Stan van, “Introduction,” in *Questioning Cosmopolitanism*, eds. Stan van Hoof and Wim Vandekerckhove (London and New York: Springer, 2010), xvii
24 Vandekerckhove and Hooft, “Introduction,” xvi
The *Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelisation and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Melange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. The *Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves ...  

Put in a more philosophical sense, a cosmopolitan is one who considers that the self is unbounded and should not be *defined* by a particular location—ethnic, cultural or national, or by language, ancestry or citizenship. Such a self would then be signified, in a postmodern sense, by “hybridity, fluidity, and recognizing the fractured and internally riven character of human selves and citizens, whose complex aspirations cannot be circumscribed by national fantasies and primordial communities”. For Rushdie, it would in a sense amount to a kind of inauthenticity not to imbibe the cosmopolitan imagination especially given the exigencies of the modern world. This is because, as Weldon puts it, we can only effectively cope with these exigencies through the hybrid lifestyle required by the cosmopolitan thesis. In other words,

> We live in a world formed by technology and trade; by economic, religious, and political imperialism and their offspring; by mass migration and the dispersion of cultural influences. In this context, to immerse oneself in the traditional practices of, say, an aboriginal culture might be a fascinating anthropological experiment, but it

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26 Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 18
involves an artificial dislocation from what actually is going on in the world.\textsuperscript{27}

Thus, the cosmopolitan imagination opposes national commitment. The non-cosmopolitan alternative, whether in its Herderian or communitarian version, is the view that a self is constituted significantly by its commitment to, and immersion in, the cultural or national structures, attachments and entanglements in order to properly develop and exercise its capacities to live in the world. In this nationalist context, every self requires a kind of rootedness, and the cosmopolitan picture of migrant postmodern self does not assure that.

The nationalist sees the cosmopolitan self as more or less the abstract and empty self of liberalism that lacks coherence because it is defined by \textit{too much} autonomy—which is to say, it is not defined by anything except itself. “If we live the cosmopolitan life,” Waldron surmises, “we draw our allegiances from here, there, and everywhere. Bits of cultures come into our lives from different sources, and there is no guarantee that they will all fit together.”\textsuperscript{28} The cosmopolitan might reply that it is unfair to summarise the central claim of cosmopolitanism as a total rejection of the role of culture or cultural attachment in a person’s life. On the contrary, what cosmopolitanism rejects is the claim that a self is constituted by just one single and coherent cultural framework that sufficiently answers the needs in such a self’s existence. Rather, it is more fulfilling to conceive of the self as drawing strength and sustenance from a hotchpotch or multiplicity of cultures and communal allegiances from here, there and everywhere.

Kwame Anthony Appiah provides a spirited defense of a cosmopolitan variety that merges well with nationalist aspirations. From a deeply personal historical trajectory that brings him and the family into the identitarian interstices of several geographic, ethnic and cultural contexts, Appiah argues for a \textit{rooted} cosmopolitanism that takes the sting out of the objection of the \textit{emptiness} of the cosmopolitan self. From a critical analysis of the purported origin of cosmopolitanism in the Stoic

\textsuperscript{28} Waldron, “Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative,” 110
philosophy, Appiah points out why even for the Stoic, the idea of cosmopolitanism as the citizenship of nowhere is far-fetched. In other words, for him,

> Yet cosmopolitanism unmodified—taken as a sort of rigorous abjuration of partiality, the discarding of all local loyalties—is a hard sell.... But the wishy-washy version of cosmopolitanism I want to defend doesn’t seek to destroy patriotism, or separate out “real” from “unreal” loyalties. More important, it isn’t exhausted by the appeal to moral universalism.²⁹

In ‘Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative,’ Waldron provides a powerful outline of the tension and problems involved in the assumptions either of cosmopolitanism or nationalism, especially around the vision of the self and its agency, character and responsibility. For him, if the cosmopolitan self appears to be schizophrenic, then the nationalist or communitarian self is essentially inauthentic and prone to stasis and eventual shrivelling. The strongest argument of the nationalist or the communitarian is that the cosmopolitan self lacks character and moral depth which comes from being largely autonomous but within a context of entanglements, loyalties and commitments not constituted by us. With this criticism, the cosmopolitan seems consigned to a dilemma:

> Either he must embrace the ethereal self of liberal deontology—the self that chooses but is not identified with any of its choices: or he must admit that the self can have a substantial character of its own, a character essential to its identity. If he chooses the former, he gives a wholly unrealistic account of choice; for on what basis can this ghost choose if it is has no values, commitments, or projects of its own? If, on the other hand, he opts for the picture of a self with a substantial essence in order to

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avoid the imputed shallowness of the former conception, then cosmopolitanism begins to look unsatisfactory. For now the self must have not just cultural characteristics in all their plurality and variety, but a distinct character, and it has not been proven that the cosmopolitan mode of engaging with the world can provide that.\textsuperscript{30}

Thus, when the nationalist-cosmopolitan controversy is couched as the conflict between ‘love for country’ and ‘love for mankind,’ such a distinction glosses over serious philosophical issues with regards to the boundary of the self.

In the final analysis, the idea of cosmopolitan citizenship is equally confronted with a charged tension between law and ethics, between sovereignty and hospitality, between universal human rights claim and particular cultural/national identities, or precisely, between cosmopolitan norms and democratic self-determination. This is the way Benhabib puts the dilemma: “Although the evolution of cosmopolitan norms of justice is a tremendous development, the relationship between the spread of cosmopolitan norms and democratic self-determination is fraught, both theoretically and politically. How can the will of democratic majorities be reconciled with norms of cosmopolitan justice? How can legal norms and standards, which originate outside the will of democratic legislatures, become binding on them?”\textsuperscript{31} How do we, in the final analysis, square the moral obligations we owe other human beings with our obligations as members of a particular bounded community? In the end, cosmopolitanism, no matter its allures, must confront the stark significance of the nation-state. For one,

...although territorially bounded states are increasingly subject to international norms, states themselves are the principal signatories as well as enforcers of the multiple human rights treaties and conventions through which international norms spread. In this process, the state is

\textsuperscript{30} Waldron, “Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative,” 111-112
\textsuperscript{31} Benhabib, \textit{Another Cosmopolitanism}, 17

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both sublated and reinforced in its authority. Throughout the international system, as long as territorially bounded states are recognized as the sole legitimate units of negotiation and representation, a tension, and at times even a fatal contradiction, is palpable: the modern state system is caught between sovereignty and hospitality, between the prerogative to choose to be a party to cosmopolitan norms and human rights treaties, and the obligation to extend recognition of these human rights to all.\textsuperscript{32}

This portends a lot of troubles and implications for postmodernism and for the modern subject in the global cultural supermarket and its bewildering identikits.

The Postmodern Paradox

Seyla Benhabib reads the sovereignty/hospitality or universal rights/particular identity dilemma confronting cosmopolitanism as what she calls ‘the paradox of democratic legitimacy.’ The paradox is essentially that while the laws that a democratic state gives its citizens are binding on them, such laws are legitimised not only by how they are constituted with reference to democratic and legal tenets; they also owe their legitimacy to whether or not they conform to universal principles that are often taken to antedate the state itself and by which the state must orient its authority. This issue, I suspect, reflects the deeper malaise of postmodernism with regards to the constitution of subjectivities.

Take the paradoxical commingling of postmodernism and fundamentalism. On the one hand, fundamentalism reflects a very deep angst against modernity and modernisation especially with regards to the secularisation project. In this sense, fundamentalism—whether Islamic or Christian—upholds a pure religious framework as the counterpoint to modern secular society. On the other hand, and this is the argument of Hardt and Negri, fundamentalism’s anti-modern project is best read as a postmodern phenomenon, and “The postmodernity of fundamentalism has to be recognized primarily in its refusal of modernity as a weapon of Euro-American hegemony”.\textsuperscript{33} The paradox

\textsuperscript{32} Benhabib, \textit{Another Cosmopolitanism}, 31

\textsuperscript{33} Hardt and Negri, \textit{Empire}, 149
here is that fundamentalism essentially becomes postmodern by appealing to a totalising tradition of pure and singular identity and values. In a strictly postmodern condition, fundamentalism would be anathema to the framework of difference and hybridity.

The pertinent question is: why is the discourse of identity still pertinent in a supposedly postmodern world? Hardt and Negri referenced postmodernism and fundamentalism as responses to the same symptoms of empire. I suspect that explanation falls short of really explaining the phenomenon. Let’s explore a particularly thorny conceptual predicament with the idea of the postmodern. In the literature, the modern and its cognates—modernism, modernity and modernisation—pose serious conceptual problems. How is the modern to be understood in conceptual terms? What is postmodernism, postmodernity and postmodernisation? How do these terms relate with one another? When did the modern begin? What is the postmodern relationship with the modern? What would we gain theoretically if we consider, like so many have done, that the postmodern is just a crisis moment in the modern?

Marshall Berman’s characterisation of the modern provides such an alternative explanation. For him, ‘I have argued that modern life and art and thought have the capacity for perpetual self-critique and self-renewal’ that invalidates the claim about a postmodern period.’\(^{34}\) This perennialist perspective on modernity assumes that the modern experience—‘experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils’—is inexhaustible.\(^{35}\) As a perpetual process, modernity feeds on itself and reinvigorates itself in multiple numbers of ways. There are several insights derivable from Berman’s perennialist conception of modernity. First, it gives us a non-complex way of understanding the historical dynamics of modernity. For instance, within the immense maelstrom of modern happenings—‘a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish’—it is possible to excavate an anti-modern temperament that does not necessarily translate into a postmodern rupture. According to Berman,


\(^{35}\) Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air, 15
To be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction. It is to be overpowered by the immense bureaucratic organizations that have the power to control and often to destroy all communities, values, lives; and yet to be undeterred in our determination to face these forces, to fight to change their world and make it our own. It is to be both revolutionary and conservative: alive to new possibilities for experience and adventure, frightened by the nihilistic depths to which so many modern adventures lead, longing to create and to hold on to something real even as everything melts. We might even say that to be fully modern is to be anti-modern: from Marx's and Dostoevsky's time to our own, it has been impossible to grasp and embrace the modern world's potentialities without loathing and fighting against some of its most palpable realities. No wonder then that, as the great modernist and anti-modernist Kierkegaard said, the deepest modern seriousness must express itself through irony.36

This argument undercuts Hardt and Negri’s perspective on the postmodernist credential of fundamentalism: to be anti-modern does not imply being postmodern. The fundamentalist’s purist identity as a reaction to modernity makes more sense as an anti-modern loathing of modern excesses. Lyotard’s initial conviction was therefore right—postmodernism is a dimension of modernity. This conviction unites Berman, Lyotard, Habermas and Foucault against, say, Arnold Toynbee and, to some extent, Daniel Bell.

In the second place, Berman’s characterisation of modernism renders the historical understanding of postmodernism as a period term essentially premature and too complex. This complexity derives, in the first place, from even our own confusion about the evolution of the modern in all its bewildering manifestations, what Berman calls ‘a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity’.37 In other words, the ambiguity of

36 Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air, 13-14
37 Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air, 15
the postmodern essentially derives from that of the modern. This ought to alert us to a conceptual insight: If the concept of modernity, within Berman’s framework, goes beyond a stable and coherent understanding of reality to capture the experience of fragmentation, turmoil, disintegration and cataclysmic changes as well as that of renewal and hope, then it is only logical that the postmodern cannot really express a different condition. And it does not! For Berman, postmodernism corresponds to a blind and groping mystique of newness that has been rudely disconnected from its origin:

...as the modern public expands, it shatters into a multitude of fragments, speaking incommensurable private languages; the idea of modernity, conceived in numerous fragmentary ways, loses much of its vividness, resonance and depth, and loses its capacity to organise and give meaning to people’s lives. As a result of all this, we find ourselves today in the midst of a modern age that has lost touch with the roots of its own modernity.38

And what vision of the modern subject are we left with? It is that of a subject that will not dissipate into the maelstrom of postmodern fragmentation; or, in Berman’s sense, a subject that possesses the capacity and depth to confront the hopelessness of the modern condition and fight it with hope and verve. Recovering the modern requires connecting between two radical impulses of our lives—“our desperate allegiances to ethnic, national, class and sexual groups which we hope will give us a firm ‘Identity,’ and the internationalization of everyday life—of our clothes and household goods, books and music, our ideas and fantasies—that spreads all our identities all over the map”.39

Where do we begin the re-visioning of the ‘postmodern nationalities’ from? How can these nationalities serve as the basis for meandering through the global cultural supermarket with solidity and depth? Or, has postmodernism swallowed all forms of identities? Have we finally arrived at a truly postnational future?

38 Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air, 17
39 Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air, 35
Nations matter...and identities too!

Let us return to Benhabib again, and the paradox of democratic legitimacy. Benhabib uses the evolution of the European Union as well as the contentious scarf affair in France in the 90s as an entry point. She deploys the concept of democratic iteration as the theoretical framework that allows for the domestication of universal human rights claims within the context of cultural and democratic self-determination within the nation-state. The scarf affair in France, particularly, raised the issue of how individuals can interject their cultural identities into the cosmopolitan principles around which the state orients itself. For her,

Culture matters; cultural evaluations are deeply bound up with interpretations of our needs, our visions of the good life, and our dreams for the future. Because these evaluations run so deep, as citizens of liberal democratic polities, we have to learn to live with what Michael Walzer has called “liberalism and the art of separation.” We have to learn to live with the otherness of others whose ways of being may be deeply threatening to our own.40

Democratic iteration, and what she also calls ‘jurisgenerative processes’—both constituting frameworks for reinterpreting, rearticulating and revalidating cosmopolitan liberal norms—eventually steps into the dialectic breach between cosmopolitan rights and identity issue. And both rights and identities are transformed in the process. Given these dynamics, one could say that postmodern battles, between unity and difference, hybridity and identity, universality and particularity, are raging within the context of the modern state! The consequence however is that the nation-state is equally confronted with the urgency of reconstituting itself and its borders. The nation-state finds a way to interweave the people-as-demos and the people-as-ethnos.

But the idea of an attenuated citizenship, disaggregated due to the continuing flow of people and identities over territories, is not the only woes that nations and nationalities have had to face. The nation-state and all ideas of bounded political communities have to confront the Empire and manoeuvre under its enveloping influences. That is the

40 Benhabib, Another Cosmopolitanism, 60
significance of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* in the understanding of the evolution of postmodern nationalities. In other words, “Any nationalist claim today is unavoidably entangled within the postmodern paradigm pushed forward by global financial capital.” The global economic flow of capital has not only broken borders but it has also allowed for the acute redefinition of who we are especially within the context of the nation-state. Our initial understanding of unitary citizenship—the individual who is a member of a state, possesses rights by that virtue and who participates in the democratic self-constituting dynamics of the state—has been gradually overtaken by what Benhabib calls a ‘disaggregation effect’, the loosening of the three components of citizenship; namely, collective identity, political membership and the right to social entitlements and benefits. Due to the flow of capital and of people, as well as the loosening of territories,

Multiculturalist...plead for the *pluralization* of cultural identities; they demand the *decentering* of administrative uniformity and the creation of *multiple* legal and jurisdictional hierarchies; they ask for the *devolution* of democratic power to regions or groups; and they welcome the *weakening* of the bond between continuing territorial residency and citizenship responsibilities.  

This manner of looking at the fate of the nation-state is too mild, as far as Hardt and Negri are concerned. The immensity of Empire on the global space effectively preludes the possibility of any effectiveness on the part of any nation-state. We should be writing the obituary of the nation-state in the not-too-distant future. The idea of an imperialist state sovereignty that has held the world in thrall for many years is being gradually but steadily replaced by the idea of imperial sovereignty. We can conveniently now talk of an irreversible passage from imperialism to

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Empire: “In the imperial world, this dialectic of sovereignty between the civil order and the natural order has come to an end. This is one precise sense in which the contemporary world is postmodern.... In a postmodern world all phenomena and forces are artificial, or as some might say, part of history. The modern dialectic of inside and outside has been replaced by a play of degrees and intensities, of hybridity and artificiality”.

This magisterial theorising of the end of the nation-state does not seem to brook any objection. The Empire demands the radical reconfiguration of all things modern. The postmodern has certainly discomfited most of our past and current certainties. We now have cosmopolitan norms and principles and institutions. Yet, the postmodern is itself dangerous. For one, says Eagleton, “for all its talk of difference, plurality, heterogeneity, postmodern theory often operates with quite rigid binary oppositions, with ‘difference’, ‘plurality’ and allied terms lined up bravely on one side of the theoretical fence as unequivocally positive, and whatever their antitheses might be (unity, identity, totality, universality) ranged balefully on the other.”

We arrive at the point of this criticism if we agree with Frederic Jameson that postmodernism equals the cultural logic of late capitalism, and we see the United States at the centre of that cultural logic rather than an amorphous empire.

More than this, the triumphal declaration of the end of the nation-state is too premature. For instance, the spectre of the nation-state still forcefully thrusts itself into our democratic imagination. Of course, what Habermas calls ‘conditions of postnational constellation’—political challenges that transcend the traditional frameworks of the nation-state—have become as inevitable as the cosmopolitan norms that have evolved as responses to these

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43 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 187-188
constellation. Yet, the idea of democracy has historically been institutionalised through the framework of the nation-state. The democratic process constitutes the framework for “the assumption that the unified citizens of a democratic community are able to shape their own social environment and can develop the capacity for action necessary for such interventions to succeed”.\textsuperscript{46} However, for Habermas, the growing image of postnational constellation undermines our democratic confidence—the idea that societies are capable of democratic self-control and self-realisation—and ultimately “gives rise to alarmist feelings of enlightened helplessness”.\textsuperscript{47} In other words,

For if state sovereignty is no longer conceived as indivisible but shared with international agencies; if states no longer have control over their national territories; and if territorial and political boundaries are increasingly permeable, the core principles of democratic liberty—that is self-governance, the demos, consent, representation, and popular sovereignty—are made distinctly problematic.\textsuperscript{48}

While it is the case that the institutionalisation of a democratic order need not manifest in the form of the nation-state, we are not thereby driven uncritically into a postmodern jubilation at the imminent loss of nationalist closure. The nation-state does not easily get lost in postnational and postmodern networks; money and the market cannot simply replace power. The significance of political power has to be measured by other non-economic means. And an important one is “the transnational task of bringing global economic networks under political control...”\textsuperscript{49} But, this is a project “that nation-states, paradoxically, can pursue from within their current scope of possibilities, but which they could realize only beyond these current limits”.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{46} Habermas, \textit{The Postnational Constellation}, 60
\textsuperscript{47} Habermas, \textit{The Postnational Constellation}, 61
\textsuperscript{48} McGrew cited in Habermas, \textit{The Postnational Constellation}, 61
\textsuperscript{49} Habermas, \textit{The Postnational Constellation}, 81
\textsuperscript{50} Habermas, \textit{The Postnational Constellation}, 82
Benhabib injects a Kantian understanding into this contradictory issue of the ‘opening’ initiated by the market networks and the closure promised by nation-state. On the one hand, there is no escaping what Habermas sees as a distinct problem arising from opening as “the ambivalent experience of increasing contingency.” In other words, “the opening of a strongly integrated lifeworld releases individuals into the ambivalence of expanded options”. Openings initiated by global economic networks thus confront us with

...the genuine risk that the worldwide movement of peoples and commodities, news and information will create a permanent flow of individuals without commitments, industries without liabilities, news without a public conscience, and the dissemination of information without a sense of boundaries and discretion. In this “global.com civilization,” persons will shrink into e-mail addresses in space, and their political and cultural lives will proliferate extensively into the electronic universe, while their temporal attachments will be short-lived, shifting and superficial. Democratic citizenship, internet utopias of global democracy notwithstanding, is incompatible with these trends. Democratic citizenship requires commitment; commitment requires accountability and a deepening of attachments.52

In spite of the cosmopolitan credentials of Kant, he recognised that it is only a bounded republicanism that possesses the depth to stand against the omnipotent despotism of a cosmopolitan government. In other words, there is, in Kant, a distinction between cosmopolitanism as an ethical attitude and cosmopolitanism as a form of political organisation. The former is possible, the latter is not. A world federation, as different from a world government, for Kant, will allow citizens to exercise ‘an ethical interest in the world’ while still exercising citizenship within the context of a nation-state. Thus, Benhabib argues,

51 Habermas, The Postnational Constellation, 83
52 Benhabib, The Claims of Culture, 182-183
A global civilization that is to be shared by world citizens will need to be nourished by local attachments; rich cultural debate; contestations about the identity of the “we”; and a sense of democratic experimentation with institutional design and redesign. As long as future collectivities reconstitute themselves through the democratic resignification of their cultural legacies in which all those affected can participate, new territorial boundaries and national frontiers can be drawn, and new institutions of power sharing, representation, and governance can be reimagined. This is the future challenge of synthesizing democratic equality and cultural diversity.53

The question of a postnational world and the status of the nation-state are critically heightened when we move from the postmodern to the postcolonial. Postmodernism and postcolonialism share a theoretical scepticism of binary oppositions and essentialism. Yet, their relationship to the grand narratives and the offerings of modernity differs. Contrary to Lyotard, the metanarratives regained their strength as they crossed the Atlantic. Within the context of what I have elsewhere called the ‘colonial moment in the global order,’54 the so-called third world requires a strong ideological weapon as a counterpoint to the growing global economic flow that plays it as a mere pawn in Empire’s chessboard of capitalist manoeuvres.

Fredric Jameson, surprisingly, is one of the first to recognise this need for ideological armament. But there are several thorny issues with his recommendations. In ‘Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,’ Jameson makes the case for the appropriateness of nationalism—with all its terrible connotations—as a fundamental ideology in the third world. Jameson’s arguments seem to fall dead-born to the ears of many postcolonial scholars for many reasons. The most obvious are the towering arrogance of the term ‘third world’, with its untoward and reductive generalisation, and the negative

53 Benhabib, The Claims of Culture, 184
54 Afolayan, “In the Grip of Empire,”
press generated by the concept of nationalism in the supposedly postmodern world of the twenty first century.

Jameson’s first signal to his theoretical inclination is the observation that “None of these [third world] cultures can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, rather, they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism—a cultural struggle that is itself a reflexion of the economic situation of such areas in their penetration by various stages of capital, or as it is sometimes euphemistically termed, of modernization”.

This point therefore immediately raises the issue of capitalist penetration of the third world, and the consequent violence to both the primitive and the Asiatic modes of production. One general reaction, by way of cultural productions, which unites all third world societies, according to Jameson, is that all third world texts are allegorical:

All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel. Let me try to state this distinction in a grossly oversimplified way: one of the determinants of capitalist culture, that is, the culture of the western realist and modernist novel, is a radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power: in other words, Freud versus Marx.... Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society. Need I add that it is precisely this very different ratio of the political to the

personal which makes such texts alien to us at first approach, and consequently, resistant to our conventional western habits of reading?  

Let us note several points. First, Jameson’s essay is meant as a defence of third world literature, however bad that term sounds. Two, his defence provides a critical juncture through which third world reaction to postmodern and postnational framework can be calibrated. Third, his critique grounds a model of a strictly materialist approach to the understanding of postcolonial situation, outside of the rampant postmodern criticisms. Beyond a few methodological items, I honestly do not see immediately what is wrong with Jameson’s intervention on behalf of third world literature. In this sense, I am taking his claim as to the provisional basis of his hypothesis for research purposes very serious. Aijaz Ahmad disagrees. In fact, he queries Jameson’s credentials as a Marxist scholar. As is to be expected, Ahmad’s take-off point is the bad concept of ‘third world literature,’ and Jameson’s cautious apology as to his awareness of its troubled and inflammatory assumptions does not deter him.

Ahmad’s critical point is that Jameson, in spite of his Marxist background, has not really abandoned the colonial/imperialist framework which conveniently theorises the Other as an-Other. The Three World theory which, for him, Jameson deploys is terribly odious:

As we come to the substance of what Jameson ‘describes’, I find it significant that First and Second Worlds are defined in terms of their production systems (capitalism and socialism, respectively), whereas the third category—the Third World—is defined purely in terms of an ‘experience’ of externally inserted phenomena. That which is constitutive of human history itself is present in the first two cases, absent in the third case. Ideologically, this classification divides the world

56 Jameson, “Third-World Literature, 69
between those who make history and those who are mere objects of it.\textsuperscript{57}

There is also the problem of coming to term with the strict compartmentalised borders of the three worlds. Where does India, with its ingenious replay of the past on the technology of the present, belong, for instance—first or third world? The Three World theory therefore inexorably locks third world societies into a totalising binary between nationalism and postmodernism. Yet, Ahmad’s grouse is not with the identification of the critical status of nationalism and its unique ideological basis but with the failure to read the shape of that nationalism as a socialist option located in the Second World which Jameson supposedly locked the Third World out of. What seems crucial in Ahmad’s critique is the absolute conception of nationalism. Thus, he argues,

Whether or not a nationalism will produce a progressive cultural practice depends, to put it in Gramscian terms, upon the political character of the power bloc which takes hold of it and utilizes it, as a material force, in the process of constituting its own hegemony. There is neither theoretical ground nor empirical evidence to support the notion that bourgeois nationalisms of the so-called Third World will have any difficulty with postmodernism; they want it.\textsuperscript{58}

Ahmad then contends that rather than being locked within an ineluctable ‘Third World’ constituted by the singular experience of colonialism, imperialism and national oppression—instead of the ‘the multiplicities of intersecting conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region, and so on’—a better hypothesis would be the radical destruction of the border between the three worlds. We live in one and not three worlds, and all the hitherto bifurcated experiences are


\textsuperscript{58} Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness, 79
intertwined in some dynamic manners. More important, socialism, Ahmad insists, is not a uniquely Second World phenomenon, but a global ideological framework that equally permeates everywhere as a viable resistance to rampaging global capitalism.

Between Ahmad and Jameson, third world and first world literature, third world politics and first world postmodernism or cultural imperialism, the significant note is simple: the nation still matters. It stands critically at the juncture of cosmopolitanism and democratic legitimacy. For Calhoun, “Nationalism helps locate an experience of belonging in a world of global flows and fears. Sometimes it underwrites struggle against the fantastically unequal and exploitative terms on which global integration is being achieved”.\(^{59}\) The solidarity framework that states represent means a whole lot even in spite of the many things that are wrong with them. One would wonder, for instance, how Hardt and Negri’s *multitude*, the hordes of political subjectivities, will overthrow the forces of Empire. Like Marx, both believe that the counter-Empire forces will arrive on the terrain of production even if no theoretical blueprint can herald their arrival.\(^{60}\) Of course, for them, counter-Empire can only be conceived in the form of counter-globalisation. Since Empire operates in non-place; it is only logical for counter-Empire to do the same.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, we have attempted to outline the possibilities and dangers that the ideas of cosmopolitanism, postmodernism and nationalism pose for the understanding of the identity of not only the self, but also of the relationship between the self and the other. Universalist norms and principles, while significant, remain empty without their iterative mediation within the self-understanding of local bounded communities. We are permitted to talk of ‘postmodern nationalities’ or even of a ‘postnational future’ but with the warning that the global and postmodern frameworks can only become meaningful only within a tight and creative synergy with the nation. It would take more than just theoretical animosities to displace the relevance of the social imaginary provided by nationalism and the nation-state.

\(^{60}\) Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 206
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