Narrative identity and postnationalism

Constructing postnational identity based on the works of Paul Ricoeur and Hannah Arendt

Abstract

Increasing globalisation, and its ensuing problems, seem to necessitate politics capable of transcending national boundaries. In the debate between communitarian and cosmopolitan political thinkers, opinions diverge on whether this is desirable or even possible. This thesis contributes to the debate by examining political identities as narratives which people ascribe to. From this perspective, the reliance on traditional collective identities such as nationality can be questioned, and the possibility of new, postnational identities can be examined. In this thesis I examine how the political philosophies of Hannah Arendt and Paul Ricoeur contribute to a theoretical underpinning of postnational identity.

In chapter 2, Ricoeur's theory of narratively construed personal identity as worked out in Oneself as Another is examined, showing why it is a useful basis for theorising postnational identity. Chapter 3 analyses how personal narrative identities can be made political in the public sphere by engaging with Hannah Arendt's The Human Condition. The notions of emplotment and representation are elaborated on in this context. Chapter 4 positions the theory of narrative political identity in the communitarian/cosmopolitan debate. In this context, David Miller's communitarian theory of nationalism is analysed and the positive case for postnational identities is made. From this thesis, it can be concluded that an understanding of identity as mobile, translatable and represented in the public sphere makes postnational political identities not only thinkable but also desirable.

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1. Introduction

Should we allow more, or less migration? Whose duty is it to remedy climate change, and why? And how should citizens of democratic countries respond to human rights violations in other countries? In an ever more globalized world, many political debates are starting to surpass the scale of national politics. Issues that were once local or national, like the politics of migration or policies on agriculture, industry, and corporate taxes, demand an international, or even global, approach. With this challenge of the enlarging scale of political processes comes a philosophical challenge: what shape should a global society attain?

The question of how to deal with politics on a level exceeding the national has been a hotly debated topic in contemporary Western political philosophy, as part of a debate between cosmopolitan and communitarian theorists. Cosmopolitan thinkers argue for an expansion of political communities beyond or without borders. The framework for cooperation between human beings then attains a universal scale, encompassing virtually every person on earth. Communitarian philosophers argue that this universal scale is unattainable, impossible, or otherwise undesirable. They assert that the nation or community in which people are born is constitutive of who they are. This influences people's ways of thinking about morality and society, and as such cannot be disregarded in favour of universal cooperation and institutions.[1]

The communitarian argument about the socially embedded nature of individuals hints at an important aspect of (democratic) politics: the articulation and the recognition of the personal and political identities of those involved. If it is true that the community which people come from determines their identity to a great extent, and these differing identities lead to different preferred policies, a universal global framework for politics may not be desirable or even possible. An example is the current dichotomy between political stances of citizens in Eastern and Western Europe. Both sides have major differences of opinion about topic such as the importance of religion to national identity and the meaning of 'European values,' leading to almost directly opposing policy preferences about issues like migration and same-sex marriage.[2]

Are we then stuck with incommensurable national political identities in a world relying less and less on national governments? In this essay, I will oppose this view, arguing

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[1] Daniel Bell, "Communitarianism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta.

[2] Pew Research Center, "Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues" (2018): 7-11.

for the possibility of a postnational political identity. This notion of a mobile, relational notion of identity established by emplotment encompasses its socially embedded nature, but can nevertheless serve as a universal starting point for political deliberation.

For this purpose, the work of Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), one of the most important French philosophers of the twentieth century, is a useful guideline. At the end of his 1983 book *Time and Narrative* 3, Ricoeur described his idea of 'narrative identity.' This notion was further examined in *Oneself as Another* (1990), in which he analysed the relation between selfhood and narrative identity, while also exploring the ethical aim of such a self – laying the foundation for a conception of citizenship. In his later works on translation and translatability Ricoeur argues that the fundamental translatability between languages should serve as a model on which human interaction should be based. This means that whatever the differences between identities, translatability is a model for "… combining 'identity' and 'alterity' at numerous levels".[3] That identities are 'translatable' in this sense suggests that they are at the very least not incommensurable.

The ideas of Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) on identity seem to point in a similar direction as those of Ricoeur. In *The Human Condition* (1958) she ascribes to human action and speech a fundamentally self-assertive dimension, making action the locus of identity. These self-disclosing actions, for her, take place in "… the "web" of human relationships".[4] Action, however, is at once irreversible and unpredictable, requiring the capabilities of forgiveness and keeping promises, "… without which not even continuity, let alone durability of any kind, would be possible in the relationships between men."[5] The irreversibility and the unpredictability of human action are structured in the public sphere, a fundamental tenet in Arendt's theory of political togetherness. In the public sphere as a space of appearance, a plurality of actors discloses itself. Investigating Arendt's notion of the public sphere can yield invaluable insights into the ways in which personal identities can become political.

Based on the research question 'how can the works of Paul Ricoeur and Hannah Arendt contribute to a theory of postnational political identity which can answer to the communitarian critique of cosmopolitanism?' I will first argue for a narrative account of

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[3] Paul Ricoeur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* vol. 21 no. 5/6 (1995): 3.

[4] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018 [1958]), 183. Ricoeur takes over Arendt's conception of action as "… that aspect of human of human doing that calls for narration." Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 58.

[5] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 237.

personal identity, relying primarily on Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*. Secondly, I will analyse the social context of individuality, making explicit the step from personal to political identity with the use of Hannah Arendt's notion of the public sphere. This has some interesting implications for the role of representation and the so-called paradox of representation. Thirdly, the narrative understanding of identity will be applied to David Miller's theory of nationalism, before examining the positive possibilities it creates for postnational political identities. In this part, I will situate narrative identity theory between communitarianism and cosmopolitanism and explain how it can be used to critique the communitarian insistence on the necessity of affiliations of national identity. Finally, some objections will be discussed regarding choices of affiliations and identifications which are not wholly voluntary, before concluding that an understanding of identity as mobile, translatable and represented in the public sphere makes postnational political identities not only thinkable but also desirable.

2. Personal Identity

'Know Thyself,' one of the adages inscribed in the temple of Apollo at Delphi allegedly read.[6] We all have an idea of who we are, but how do we get to this idea? And is it even possible to know with a degree of accuracy who we are? The problem of knowing who we are has several dimensions of importance for the idea of a postnational identity. First, if it turns out that knowing oneself is fundamentally impossible, notions of identity of any kind may be bound to fail. So, if a postnational identity is to be possible, the underlying notion of personal identity must be able to support it. Secondly, if identity is indisputably tied up with a person's unique cultural background, a postnational interpretation overcoming the differences between cultures may be a bridge too far. To pave the way for these more advanced problems, an understanding of personal identity must be reached. To do so, I will first examine how personal identity is established and what it entails by engaging with Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*. I will occasionally supplement this reading with passages from Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* since her conception of identity is complementary to that of Ricoeur.[7]

In common usage, the idea of knowing oneself involves at least the following three presuppositions: a) there is a self, b) this self can be identified, so it has an identity and c) we can know the identity of the self. In his theory of narrative identity, Ricoeur subjects these assumptions to scrutiny in an elucidating manner. In *Oneself as Another,* he starts with an examination of the relationship between self and identity, distinguishing two notions of identity as either sameness or selfhood.[8] In what Ricoeur terms his hermeneutics of the self, sameness and selfhood stand in a dialectical relation to each other.[9] Importantly, within selfhood a further dialectic is implied between self and other than self, pointing toward the necessity of others in the constitution of personal identity.[10] In the following paragraphs I will describe Ricoeur's theory of identity, after which I will analyse it and highlight the ways in which the building blocks for an idea of postnational identity are present in it.

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[6] T. Dempsey, *The Delphic Oracle, Its Early History, Influence and Fall* (Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, 1918), 141.

[7] The connection between these authors is exemplified by the fact that Ricoeur wrote the preface to the French translation of Arendt's *The Human Condition*.

[8] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 3.

[9] This means that sameness and selfhood are not simply opposed, but that their relationship can vary over time. Their main difference concerns the way in which sameness and selfhood establish permanence in time, respectively "… the perseverance of character and the constancy of the self in promising." Ibid., 124.

[10] Ibid., 4.

2.1. Sameness and selfhood

As Ricoeur explains in the introduction to *Oneself as Another*, his theory is situated in between two traditions of thinking about identity. On the one hand, the Cartesian 'cogito,' the notion of the ego as the only certainty that can be established through the exercise of radical doubt, "[t]he subjectivity that posits itself through reflection on its own doubt."[11] On the other hand, the Nietzschean view of a 'shattered cogito,' which extends Descartes' doubt to the internal world, coming to view any notion of a coherent self as illusory.[12] If the self is not to be understood as either an essence, the cogito, or an absence, as in Nietzsche, what options remain for the idea of an identity?

For Ricoeur, the problem of identity is further complicated because answers to the question 'who' are often answered in terms of 'what.' He proposes to solve this difficulty by distinguishing between two forms of identity, sameness and selfhood, corresponding respectively to the Latin words *idem* and *ipse*.[13] The difference between these notions of identity is encountered in the different manners in which they establish a form of permanence in time.[14] What is at stake is determining whether there is "a form of permanence in time which can be connected to the question "who?" inasmuch as it is irreducible to any question of "what?""[15]

To speak of identity then refers to several ways of understanding why a person remains the same over time. The notion of identity as sameness, for Ricoeur, contains numerical, qualitative, and continual aspects. Numerical, because someone is some-one: the same one as before, re-identifiable as such. Qualitative, because qualitative resemblance serves the purpose of reidentification. The qualitative resemblance of a person to that same person at an earlier point becomes weaker the more time has passed; consider the difference in habits and appearance between a person at age one and at age twenty. Uninterrupted continuity must thus be demonstrated to prove that this person is the same as before.[16]

How does this conception of identity as sameness differ from identity as selfhood? Bernard P. Dauenhauer, in his book *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics*, succinctly summarizes: "*Idem* expresses the self's spatiotemporal sameness. *Ipse* expresses

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[11] Ibid., 7.

[12] Ibid., 13.

[13] Ibid., 115-16.

[14] Ibid., 116.

[15] Ibid., 118.

[16] Ibid., 116-18.

its uniqueness and its ability to initiate."[17] The ability to initiate which Ricoeur finds characteristic of ipse-identity is the ability, through action, to set something in motion – to start a chain of events.[18] In his notion of action as initiating something, Ricoeur does not draw explicitly on Hannah Arendt, but the affinity to her theory of action is clear. For Arendt, acting is both beginning something and revealing oneself to others. She states that "[i]n acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world."[19] The ipse-pole of identity as selfhood is a self-constancy that cannot be reduced to what one is, but only to who one is.[20]

These two poles of identity are not exclusive to one another, but instead may overlap or diverge to a differing degree. Ricoeur describes the moment when both poles overlap as character. Character "designates the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized."[21] These dispositions, acquired through the internalization of identifications with values, norms, people and other things external to the self, "assures at once numerical identity, qualitative identity, uninterrupted continuity across change, and, finally, permanence in time which defines sameness."[22] The way ipse-identity contributes to character is through loyalty. People frequently identify with values, norms or models. Identifying with this "otherness assumed as one's own" causes loyalty towards these values, maintaining the character's permanence in time by internalizing them.[23] Character can thus be seen as the overlapping of ipse- and idem-identity, because the identification of the self is entirely dependent on the identification of the same.

The poles of identity diverge, however, in the process of keeping one's word. Keeping one's word entails a different form of permanence in time that has nothing to do with habits or disposition. A promise made and the intention to keep it requires constancy of the self even if the promise involves an act that is 'out of character.' Others can count on someone to keep their word, but also hold them accountable if they do not. For Ricoeur, these factors

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[17] Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 110.

[18] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 105.

[19] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 179.

[20] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 123.

[21] Ibid., 121.

[22] Ibid., 121-22.

[23] Ibid., 121.

together lead to a person having responsibility.[24] Here, the ipse- and idem-poles of identity do not coincide.[25]

The varying relation between sameness and selfhood requires mediation. Here the notion of narrative identity comes in. Ricoeur states:

> "Having thus situated it in this interval, we will not be surprised to see narrative identity oscillate between two limits: a lower limit, where permanence in time expresses the confusion of *idem* and *ipse*; and an upper limit, where the *ipse* poses the question of its identity without the aid and support of the *idem*."[26]

How does this narrative identity work?

2.2. Narrative identity and ethical implications

The sixth study of *Oneself as Another* starts with an analysis of narrative identity as the identity of the character or personage in a story.[27] The identity of the character is "constructed in connection with that of the plot."[28] It is important to emphasize the function of what Ricoeur calls 'emplotment.' Emplotment is the process of gathering contingent features into a unifying story.[29] Say, for example, someone takes being in a storm at an early age to be one of the most important events in their life, making them eventually pursue a career as a meteorologist. Another person witnessing the same storm may have forgotten all about it or may assign it a completely different meaning. By constructing a story through emplotment, the character of the story creates his or her personal identity. Importantly, this story is not all factual, but a blending of fiction and experiences:

> "… it is precisely because of the elusive character of real life that we need the help
> of fiction to organize life retrospectively, after the fact, prepared to take as
> provisional and open to revision any figure of emplotment borrowed from fiction
> or from history."[30]

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[24] Dauenhauer, *Promise and Risk*, 121.

[25] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 124.

[26] Ibid., 124.

[27] Ibid., 141.

[28] Ibid., 141.

[29] Dauenhauer, *Promise and Risk*, 124-25.

[30] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 162.

The character in this story, furthermore, can be considered a plot in itself.[31] The identity of the character is as dependent on the development of the story as the story on the development of the character, making personal identity correlative to that of the story.[32] Characters in a story, as such, have a certain role to play. In the wide variety of roles which characters can play in a story, a distinction between two main categories can be made: agents and sufferers.[33] Agents are capable of initiating action, whereas sufferers are undergoing (the consequences of) action.[34] As such, my actions figure in the stories of others, and the actions of others which I undergo – or suffer – figure in my narrative, meaning the narrative identities of persons are fundamentally intertwined. This interrelation between narratives, and thus the interdependence of identities, was already noticed by Hannah Arendt. She terms this intertwinement "the "web" of human relationships."[35] For her action is only meaningful in the web of human relationships; therefore, in a vacuum, meaningful action is impossible. Because of the relationality inherent to action, "[t]o do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin, and the story that an act starts is composed of its consequent deeds and sufferings."[36]

According to Ricoeur, there is an asymmetry between actors and sufferers which requires evaluation. Only in the evaluation of the acting and suffering of characters can people be said to be persons.[37] The stress here is on evaluation: narratives are never neutral with regard to the actions, agents and sufferers they describe.[38] Narratives make it possible to ascribe actions to agents: "Telling a story is saying who did what and how, by spreading out in time the connection between these various viewpoints."[39] Because action can narratively be imputed to an agent, the ethical question of responsibility arises. To be responsible means to provide to an other who needs you and asks "Where are you?" the response: "Here I am!" – an expression of selfhood.[40]

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[31] Ibid., 143.

[32] Ibid., 144.

[33] Ibid., 144.

[34] Ibid., 145.

[35] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 183.

[36] Ibid., 190. This will be discussed more in-depth in chapter 3.

[37] Dauenhauer, *Promise and Risk*, 125.

[38] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* 164.

[39] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 146.

[40] Ibid., 165.

This expression is what Ricoeur calls an attestation: the attestation of being oneself acting and suffering.[41] The attestation of selfhood thus arises in response to the need of someone other, elucidating the meaning of Ricoeur's notion of the "ethical primacy of the other than self over the self."[42] Identity then depends on the relation to an other, and for that reason one is accountable for one's actions.

2.3. Uses of narrative theory for postnational political identity

The theory of narrative identity has some advantages for a political identity that transcends national boundaries, over either more essentialist accounts or theories that abandon the notion of identity altogether. First, the mobility of identities: "they are the outcome of the combination of the story's coherence as a structured whole and the multiple, discordant events and actions that the story recounts."[43] Perhaps the principal strength of Ricoeur's theory is that its analysis is limited to the structure of identity, without ascribing it specific content. This makes it possible to, in a sense, 'know thyself' without having to resort to the notion of a transcendental subject or conceding that the quest for the self is a futile endeavour. The contingency of the events and actions encompassed in narratives about personal identity accounts for the mobility of identity. The next chapters will show the relevance of the mobility of identity for political collectives.

Secondly, the characters in a story come from somewhere; they have specific heritages.[44] Even if identity is always tied to a historical background, nothing in this theory suggests it is principally incommensurable with other, equally contingent, backgrounds. Different identities come with different heritages, but these heritages are not immutable. Events and actions can be put in different contexts, and their relative value for 'who we are' can change. This will prove important with respect to the differences between nationalism and postnationalism which will be discussed in chapter 4.

Thirdly, the structure of identity as constituted in relation to others highlights the inescapability of the ethical aspect of responsibility for one's actions. Every action has its actors and its sufferers, and the relation between these is one of asymmetry. It is necessary to be watchful of imbalances of power in this regard. Responsibility for one's actions is then required of the individual in relation to an other, but this feature extends to narratively

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[41] Ibid., 22.

[42] Ibid., 168.

[43] Dauenhauer, *Promise and Risk*, 126.

[44] Ibid., 127.

constructed collectives and to political life in general. Political actions and events exemplify this requirement: if a representative makes any decision – especially when it is controversial - she will have to bear the responsibility for it and be held accountable for it. If a nation that is part of a union of nations like the EU makes a political decision, they will similarly be held responsible for it. Even countries that do not participate in any supra-national framework will be held accountable for their actions by the other countries in the world.

The narrative account is not free of difficulties, however. Perhaps most problematic for the account of narrative identity as a building block for postnational identity is the question whether people of different groups are willing to set aside their differences; to acknowledge that their identity does not have an ineradicable essence. The narrative account makes it plausible that they can, and maybe even should, do this, but not every person will comply. Some traits constitutive of particular narrative identities, like the adherence to a religion, are often considered to be of major significance for personal and political identity. The values one identifies with often have to do with a cultural or historical heritage as well, identifications which many would go so far as to fight for.

Denying people such important identifications is not called for, though. Through an examination of Hannah Arendt's notion of the public sphere as a place for the presentation and representation of identities to others and oneself, I will examine in the following chapter how narratively construed political identities unite people from different contexts into one collective. I will then take a closer look at the representation of political identities and specifically examine the implications of the narrative account for the paradox of representation.

3. From personal to political identity

In the previous chapter, the focus was on the construction of personal identity through narrative. I will now examine how to get from personal identity to political identity. To answer this question, Hannah Arendt's notion of the public sphere as a public space of appearance is essential. First, however, her notion of action must be examined. Ricoeur's different understanding of action in *Oneself as Another* can be used to nuance Arendt's account. Of the aspects already pointed out of the narrative project, its inherent relationality is especially important. What are the relations between persons in political situations and settings, and how can they be narratively understood?

Political identities rely as much on narrative construction as personal identities, arguably even more. What brings people together into a collective better than a shared history? I will examine more concretely the relation between political identities and collectives by an analysis of how common identifications around contingent factors, through emplotment, serve as a basis for collective identities. Then I will argue that there are commonalities between these groups: they all have a particular perspective on reality, and they are constituted by a form of representation.

The notion of representation, however, has its own share of problems, as is most clearly seen in the 'paradox of representation': in the representation of an identity, representatives come to occupy a position above those they are meant to represent. The main idea is that representatives do not properly represent the people they were chosen to represent, because they do not belong to the people anymore. This age-old conviction fuels the sentiment that direct democracy is intrinsically superior to representative democracy. With the theories of Hannah Arendt and Paul Ricoeur in hand, however, I will challenge this belief, and argue that the representational aspect is crucial for the constitution of group identities and their coming together in a democracy. In that sense, I will offer a reading of Arendt and Ricoeur as precursors to the representative turn.[45]

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[45] The representative turn in political theory is a new appreciation of the role of representation in democratic politics. I will here refer primarily to the thesis that "constituencies do not exist beforehand, but they are constantly made and remade through representative politics. Who 'we, the people' are is an ongoing thing." Sofia Näsström, "Where is the Representative Turn Going?" *International Journal of Political Theory* 10(4) (2011): 506. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885111417783.

3.1. Action and the public sphere

On the narrative account based on Paul Ricoeur, which was discussed in chapter 2, personal identity is mobile, relational, and tied to a certain background. Hannah Arendt and Ricoeur agree on many of these aspects of identity, but the conclusions Arendt draws regarding the 'space of appearance' are worth analysing. The public sphere, as a space of appearance, is the space where different political identities meet and interact. The starting point of this analysis, however, should be Arendt's conception of action since action for her separates the personal from the political.

Action is for Arendt what determines the 'who' as opposed to the 'what' of a person. It is through self-revealing action that people "reveal actively their unique personal identities."[46] Through action, then, people reveal what Ricoeur would call their ipse-identity. Arendt's notion of action, like Ricoeur's, is tied up with the idea of beginning: "To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin".[47] This conception of action is focused on the sense in which man is capable of beginning, and not on the beginning of processes in the world which are not causally attributable to human beings.

On this point, Arendt and Ricoeur diverge. Whereas Arendt discusses action in terms of unique and self-revealing human acts that set something in motion, Ricoeur distinguishes between two different understandings of action in relation to causality. First, action is a beginning "*in medias res*": action creates a beginning in a causally determined world that has already begun.[48] This is an acknowledgement of the fact that causal – historical, biological, political – chains of events have an impact on what actions are even possible. Second, and in line with Arendt, beginning is starting something new and unexpected, intervening in the world through intentional action.[49] It is for this reason that a person can be held responsible for an action.[50] Ricoeur accepts that "separating what belongs to the agent from what belongs to the chains of external causality proves to be a highly complex operation."[51] For him, the initiative, or the power-to-do, joins these two, the causal history and the capacity to act, together.

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[46] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 179.

[47] Ibid., 176.

[48] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 105.

[49] Ibid., 109.

[50] Ibid., 107.

[51] Ibid., 106.

The difference between action as causally determined by external factors and action as initiating something new is important. The interesting feature of action, for Arendt, is not that action arises as a consequence of a causal history, but that it is a self-revealing beginning of something unexpected, and thereby an expression of who one is. On this reading, unreflectively taking over characteristics of others like family or friends is not action, and as such is not political. Only actively appearing to others in the public sphere is the sort of action that can be called political.

Arendt did not differentiate between idem- and ipse-aspects of identity but looking through this lens reveals that she was primarily concerned with the latter. The characteristics that habitually and unreflectively mark someone's sameness through time, the identity shaped by external causal chains of events, are what Ricoeur would call identity as sameness, or idem-identity. The initiating aspect of identity and its appearance in public are the start of a new causal chain, and constitute the identity as selfhood, or ipse-identity. For Arendt, then, only the ipseity of identity can be rendered political. Keeping in mind the idem-aspects of identity, and the relation between ipse and idem that Ricoeur stresses, however, explains why some identifications that are acquired by habit are still deemed worthwhile in a personal and in a political sense.

The two authors agree in their understanding of action as fundamentally intertwined with actions of others. I discussed this feature of Ricoeur's theory in paragraph 1.3. For Arendt actions and the narratives of these actions take place in relation to others, in the web of human relationships.[52] Because of the relationality of action, every person is simultaneously actor and sufferer. "Since action acts upon beings who are capable of their own actions," Arendt states, "reaction, apart from being a response, is always a new action that strikes out on its own and affects others."[53] This means that, by acting, someone sets in motion action and reactions to it, but those reactions are actions in themselves. It also shows that the narratives of one's actions include at least some actions of others.

Since action, according to Arendt, always establishes relationships, it cuts across boundaries and limits, it is boundless, and as the consequences of a single action are impossible to oversee, its outcomes are unpredictable.[54] The constant interplay of different actors and sufferers, and the boundlessness and unpredictability of action, accounts for the

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[52] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 188.

[53] Ibid., 190.

[54] Ibid., 190.

frailty of human togetherness. Human togetherness requires structure to not succumb to its own boundlessness and unpredictability.[55] For example, if every person on earth would believe his or her own actions and identity to be superior to those of everyone else, anarchy would likely ensue. A crucial way in which human connectedness is structured, according to Arendt, is through the space of appearance.[56] It is the expression of

> "the conviction that action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me …"[57]

From this citation, three important aspects of what I will from now on call the public sphere can be gleaned, which will be discussed in turn.

First, it is a space of appearance, wherein people reveal and express themselves – their narratively construed identities – to others. To appear to others and to have others appear to us, according to Arendt, is the only way in which we can know something of reality, and in this sense, "appearance – something that is seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves – constitutes reality."[58] If people are to let anything of themselves be known to others, it must be through their appearance. Without going into the questions whether and how we can know reality, or necessarily accepting Arendt's ideas in this regard, it is not hard to accept that in conversations or discussions with others, it is necessary to appear in some way to them.

This is not to say that all appearances to others come across the way they are intended. Who one is, is only revealed through action and speech, which for Arendt are interlinked, even if the identity of this 'who' remains unknown to the person him- or herself.[59] Self-disclosure, then, is the by-product of action or speech, which is often concerned with some worldly object.[60] This means that for Arendt, it is impossible to talk about one's interests without revealing one's identity to others. It also means that others have a crucial role in interpreting the self-disclosing actions of a person.

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[55] Ibid., 191.

[56] Note that the space of appearance only structures human action, and therefore its boundlessness and unpredictability, without eradicating these characteristics.

[57] Ibid., 198.

[58] Ibid., 50.

[59] Ibid., 182.

[60] Ibid.

Secondly, and because such self-disclosure is inescapable, the public sphere is public as opposed to private or social. Public means that something is there for everyone to be heard or witnessed. It designates Arendt's sense of the 'world,' as common to all people instead of referring to their private space in it.[61] The public gains its meaning from a richness of perspectives, because "everyone sees and hears from a different position."[62] On the other hand, things that are not fit to be displayed in public, such as intense bodily pain or love, constitute the private realm.[63] The distinction between the public and the social is slightly more complicated. The social, in *The Human Condition,* refers to the extension of processes traditionally kept in the private sphere, like economic concerns, to a societal scale.[64] Arendt saw modernity's increasing bureaucratization, and the reduction of public debate to questions of economic policy, as the unwarranted triumph of the social over the public.[65]

Thirdly, the public sphere is constituted by speaking and acting together and precedes any formal organization of society. Since the public sphere is not inextricably bound to a specific organization of society, or a specific sort of institution, it is only potentially present.[66] However, a healthy public sphere cannot arise under any circumstances. It requires particularly some features characteristic of democracy, like equal access to, and equal right of expression in, the public sphere. When one view becomes so dominant as to silence, or to even threaten the existence of other views, the public sphere is weaker than when every group does have the ability to express their view. The public sphere, then, is not existent or non-existent, but can be strong or weak to varying degrees. I will now discuss a critique of Arendt's conception of the public sphere, and in replying to it argue further that democratic equality is a requirement of a strong public sphere.

The public sphere and democratic equality

Because Arendt's idea of the public sphere is not bound to a specific configuration of society, it may seem that a healthy public sphere can potentially exist under any political system.

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[61] Ibid., 52.

[62] Ibid., 57.

[63] Ibid., 51-2.

[64] Margaret Canovan, introduction to *The Human Condition* by Hannah Arendt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018 [1958]), xxvi.

[65] Seyla Benhabib, "The Embattled Public Sphere: Hannah Arendt, Juergen Habermas and Beyond," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, no. 90 (Dec. 1997): 4-5. https://doi.org/10.3167/th.1997.449002.

[66] Ibid., 199.

Nevertheless, the equality between different groups in society makes democratic systems especially well-suited to a flourishing public sphere, as I will argue in response to Seyla Benhabib, theorist of the public sphere and a critical reader of Arendt. She points out that Arendt's conception of the public sphere seems to support two contradictory readings. On the one hand, Arendt laments the loss of the public sphere under conditions of modernity, whereby the public sphere is represented by the ideal of the Greek polis as a place for the privileged to express their greatness. This seems to express the wish for a return to a more aristocratic form of public participation. On the other hand, she suggests that the public sphere appears anywhere people act together.[67]

I am inclined to the second reading since Arendt's concern for plurality supports the latter, democratic interpretation rather than the former.[68] She states that human plurality is "the basic condition of both action and speech, [and] has the twofold character of equality and distinction."[69] Equality, because without a measure of equality people could not understand each other and distinction, because if everyone was the same there would be no need for communication at all.[70] If only a part of society has the means and the right to present itself in the public sphere, this will alienate the other parts of society, side-lining their potential political identities. This failure to acknowledge the plurality of identities in society, and their equal worth, in turn reduces the capacity to act of society in its entirety.

It is especially telling that in the section "The traditional substitution of making for acting," Arendt condemns the aristocratic notion, originating in Plato, that a ruling elite should govern society to achieve some higher goal.[71] 'Rule' is conceptualized here as the idea that only by dividing society into rulers and ruled, political togetherness is possible.[72] Arendt's condemnation of this sense of ruling is consistent with her denunciation of the increasing bureaucratization of politics in modernity – which today we would call technocracy – as an "instrumentalization of action and the degradation of politics into a

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[67] Benhabib, "The Embattled Public Sphere, 3-4.

[68] Note also that Arendt describes how "the whole body of arguments against "democracy," [] the more consistently and better reasoned it is, will turn into an argument against the essentials of politics." Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 220.

[69] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 221-23.

[72] Ibid., 222.

means for something else."[73] The authentic human capacity for self-revealing action then becomes stifled, and plurality is flattened into disagreements over specific policies. The rule by the few over the many is thus ruled out if we are to have a healthy public sphere. The democratic notion of self-rule by the people over the people is necessary to safeguard the capacity for self-revealing action and plurality.

To summarize the analysis of the public sphere, then, personal identity can become political by its appearance in the public sphere. Personal identity, narratively construed, takes into account the acts of others, so it is relational. In the public sphere, as a political domain organizing the revelation of identities to others through action and speech, personal identities can become political. Narrative political identity thus depends on a) appearance through self-disclosing action and speech, b) in public of a, c) particular identity and d) it requires democratic equality in a strong public sphere for all different political identities to be able to adequately express themselves, so no political identity can claim dominance.

3.2. Political narratives in the public sphere

I have shown how Hannah Arendt's idea of the public sphere acts as a common space for personal, narratively construed identities to reveal themselves to others with different political identities. It seems that if every individual's personal identity can be rendered political, the public sphere needs to incorporate over seven and a half billion distinct identities. However, people often have some identifications in common with other people, such as nationality, ethnicity, religious beliefs or gender identity. Such common identifications can serve as a basis for the formation of collective identities. This is not to say that personal identity then becomes irrelevant. For Arendt, the plurality of unique personal identities remains essential and should not be given up in favour of a collective. It is only by choosing among many possible identifications the ones which one is willing to present to others, by appearing to them in the public sphere as such and such, that political identity is constituted. I will now discuss in more detail how this can be understood.

The identification with certain contingent factors, as the main aspect of creating political identities strong enough to bring together large amounts of people, can be explained through returning to Ricoeur's notion of emplotment. As stated in chapter 2, emplotment means gathering certain contingent factors into a unifying narrative, which one can identify with. The development of identity is dependent on the development of the story. In the sense

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[73] Ibid., 230.

of collectives, many people converge on the same identifications. There is no reason to assume that every single identification creates a different group, although it seems likely that members of some collectives have only one identification in common, such as for example their language.

Through the identification with a specific political narrative, a group crucially claims, 'we identify with this story as opposed to another story,' thereby differentiating themselves from other collectives. One of the best examples of such political narratives remains that of nationality. The identification with one's country of origin can be based on its language, its location, family living in the same country, its culture, etc., or a combination of such factors. Often, these identifications are made by reference to a specific national myth, a shared history or sometimes even a shared destiny.[74]

An illuminating example is the case of Macedonia, now Northern Macedonia. Ever since the existence of the state Macedonia, it has been involved in a dispute over its name with its neighbouring country Greece. Greece claims that the name Macedonia is a misappropriation of Greek heritage, "because Alexander the Great and the ancient Macedonians were Greeks, and because ancient and modern Greece are bound in an unbroken line of racial and cultural continuity, it is only Greeks who have the right to identify themselves as Macedonian."[75] Conversely, nationalist Macedonians claim that it is they who descend from Alexander and have the sole legitimate claim to Macedonian identity.[76]

Two different groups, then, claim the same national myth. The identification with the ancient Macedonians of Alexander the Great's time is deemed important enough for political strife, even if the identification to a historical people of more than two millennia ago can hardly be factually proven. By emplotting their narrative as the continuation of the ancient Macedonian narrative, both collectives claim this identification for themselves. This claim to identity on both ends precludes the possibility that both claims are partially right. Note, furthermore, that the claim to being the legitimate heirs of Alexander is not only considered important regarding Greek or Macedonian identity as it appears to others, but also as it appears to members of the collectives themselves.

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[74] See for example books like Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

[75] Loring M. Danforth, "Claims to Macedonian Identity: The Macedonian Question and the Breakup of Yugoslavia" *Anthropology Today* Vol. 9, No. 4 (Aug. 1993): 4. https://doi.org/10.2307/2783448.

[76] Danforth, "Claims to Macedonian Identity," 7.

From this conception of collective political identities as choosing to identify with a certain story, it becomes clear that not every individual requires a separate place in the public sphere. Admittedly, identifications will often be acquired by habit more than anything else. In this case, the identity built around these identifications has mostly aspects of idem-identity. Some identifications will be seen as a private matter, while others require a voice in the public sphere. Which identifications require political expression also changes over time. The public sphere does not incorporate every conceivable political identity, although in theory it could. By identifying with certain elements instead of others, collectives differentiate themselves from others, so no universal political identity is possible. Narratives of political identity are thus partial: they offer a perspective on reality with which a person or a collective identifies, which differentiates them from other narratives.

These narratives overlap and coexist. Someone can at the same time be a Berliner, a German, a vegan and a Muslim, and count all these identifications as important in the unified story of who they are. At the same time, they can regard for example their eating habits a personal matter, which need not be politically expressed. In the multiplicity of political identities that exists, it is important that not one of these declares itself universal or dominant. As discussed before, this will undermine the capacity for action and plurality in society, leading to a weakening of the public sphere. A strong public sphere can serve as a space for different identities and the expression of new or formerly unrecognised political identities. Next, I will look more precisely at the principal mechanism through which political identities are explicated to members of collectives and to the members of other collectives in the public sphere.

3.3. Representation

This is where the notion of representation comes in. To make multiple people adhere to one political identity, and to coherently formulate the demands that come with this identity, it must be represented somehow, to others and to the members of the collective itself. Benhabib's reading of the public sphere in Arendt's work clarifies how this process works:

"In entering the public, every new social, cultural, political group presents its point of view to others, or it re-presents itself to others, in the sense of refashioning itself as a presence in the public"[77]

If everyone would personally participate in the public sphere, the sheer number of voices would drown out every possible reasoned argument. The representation of a group by a smaller number of appointees serves to reduce the number of voices in the public sphere, making conversation possible. These representatives are tasked with presenting the point of view of the group to others in the public sphere, a task made possible because the group and its representatives identify with the same political narrative. This is self-revealing action *par excellence* and is thus in line with the ipse-aspects of identity. If a point of view is not yet present in the public sphere, there is the option to present and represent it.

Political representation runs into a major problem, however, often termed the paradox of representation. This problem consists of the separation of representatives from the ones they should represent, by virtue of their privileged position as representatives. Arendt describes how

"The commonplace notion already to be found in Plato and Aristotle that every political community consists of those who rule and those who are ruled (on which assumption in turn are based the current definitions of forms of government – rule by one or monarchy, rule by few or oligarchy, rule by many or democracy) rests on a suspicion of action…"[78]

Such forms of government, then, reduce society into the rulers and the ruled. It is this fear that the paradox of representation addresses: how can representatives accurately represent the ruled if they have become the rulers?

Ricoeur's account of narrative personal identity, and my reading of Hannah Arendt's extension of personal identity to political identity through the public sphere, have some features of a constructivist account of identity. There is no core, soul, or essence of identity, but identity is something *constructed*, in this case by adhering to narratives through emplotment. Constructivist theories, as opposed to essentialist theories of identity are better equipped to deal with the paradox of representation. The main reason for this is that the idea

[77] Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 210.

[78] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 222.

of narrative construction of identities can ascribe representatives a position which is not opposed to the positions of those they aim to represent. Instead, the representation of political identities by representatives plays an active role in the creation of the political identities in question.

It is important to note, however, that Ricoeur's theory cannot be considered purely constructivist while Arendt's comes closer to this notion. As discussed before, Arendt stresses the actively chosen ipse-aspects of identities, which can be made political in the public sphere. Ricoeur's stress on the idem-aspects of identity in addition to ipse-aspects, shows the importance of contextual factors which determine which identifications can be emplotted, whereas a pure constructivism encompasses only actively chosen ipse-identifications. His position thus involves elements of constructivism while not disregarding the contextual factors determining what can be constructed.

Representatives can shape the political identities of those they represent, through the act of representation. It is the representation of a political identity that is their function, as opposed to ruling. They have the attention of the ones they represent and of the other groups in the public sphere, and they can decide to incorporate a new identification into the story of who they are and who they represent. What Arendt would call their self-disclosing appearance in public is thus constitutive of the idea that their representees have of themselves as a political collective. Representatives are in this way extensions of the group they represent, by being a vocal point which influences its narrative, as well as representing it to the group itself and to members of other groups. If my representative, over time, comes to stand further from my beliefs, I have the option of choosing another representative or even of starting a new political movement to portray more accurately my political identity in the public sphere.

Representatives are thus not the only factors in this process. I discussed in 3.1. that not all appearances in the public sphere come across as they are intended. When an appearance is heard or seen by others, it acquires its meaning. Ricoeur concurrently describes that "[j]ust when the work is separated off from its author, its entire being is gathered up in the signification that the other grants it."[79] The one who interprets the representation has an equally large share in determining its meaning, whether he or she is a member of the group the representative aims to represent or a member of another group.

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[79] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 156.

3.4. Political identity and postnational identity

In this chapter I have examined how for Arendt personal identity can become political identity through action, which is inherently self-revealing, in the public sphere. Aside from active self-revealing, however, action is also rooted in a causal history. The revelation of one's political identity takes place in the public sphere as a space of appearance, as the space where different identities appear to each other. The public sphere is potentially present anywhere people act together, but to guarantee that in the plurality of identities none are threatened, or disregarded, democratic equality is necessary.

I then returned to Ricoeur to argue that the way of deciding one's political identity is by emplotment. People determine their political identity by choosing what story they are part of, and what identifications figure in that story. For this reason, multiple people often ascribe to the same story. Emplotment is not a factual endeavour per se, so part of the story one adheres to may be fictional. Choosing to belong to one story as opposed to another explains the chosen political narrative's partiality. Furthermore, emplotment in this sense is reliant on representation. To determine the political identity of a group of people, a smaller number of people represent a narrative to the group itself, and to others, in the public sphere. Members of the group and of other groups then interpret the representation.

For the possibility of a postnational identity, the implications are as follows. Political identity, like personal identity, is constructed through emplotment. It contains identifications that are deemed important enough to present in the public sphere. One can be part of a political narrative, say, the left, while considering some topics or identifications a private matter. The plurality of unique persons is safeguarded in this way. If I were to identify myself with a political narrative that exceeded the boundaries of my country, I could do so while also identifying with some of its traditions. In the following chapter I will further analyse the possibility of postnational political identities based on the theory of narrative identity and situate it in the communitarian/cosmopolitan debate.

If the possibility of constructing postnational identities is, given the above, not out of the question, there are still some steps to take to argue for their relevance and for their advantages. It can be objected that if political identities are all constructed in the same way, by the emplotment of contingent factors, postnational identities are no better than national identities. What makes the latter better equipped than national identities to deal with global challenges? And what would make people prefer postnational over national identities? In the next chapter I will address these issues first by showing the limitations of national identities

from the narrative perspective. Then, I will make the positive case for postnational identities as capable of dealing with these limitations.

Another objection is that postnational political identities are partial, due to preferring one story over another. They may therefore be just as exclusive as national identities. If this is the case, is anything won by changing the scale of political identities? And if all political identities are partial, how can they communicate and negotiate with one another without this resulting in conflicts? In paragraph 4.3. an answer to this question is offered based on Ricoeur's model of linguistic hospitality.

4. Postnational political identity

In this chapter, I will situate the theory of narrative political identity in the cosmopolitan/communitarian debate. I will first engage with the communitarian theory of David Miller as worked out in chapter 2 of *Citizenship and National Identity* (2000), examining the implications of narrative identity theory for his communitarian theory of nationalism. I will then present the positive case for postnational political identities, as capable of circumventing the shortcomings of communitarianism while acknowledging the importance of context. Ricoeur himself gives some indications of the concrete way we should envision narrative identities communicating and exchanging with other narrative identities without resulting in conflicts, and I will look at these to flesh out my account of postnational identities. Finally, I will discuss two objections, namely that some identifications may be forced upon individuals, and that the adherence to postnational identity first requires a democratic public sphere, whereas the public sphere in some parts of the world is repressed. The starting point in addressing such objections, I contend, is to point out the combination of constraint and freedom at work in any process of identity construction. The notion of counterpublics is the following step in providing an answer to them.

4.1. Narrative identity between communitarianism and cosmopolitanism

The debate between communitarian and cosmopolitan thinkers in political philosophy is difficult to reduce to two specific positions. While many varying views can be found on both sides of the debate, one distinction is especially important to highlight. Cosmopolitan ideas are universalist, because they presuppose universal values stemming from the common humanity of all persons as individuals. Communitarians, conversely, espouse a form of contextualism, and thereby "emphasize that human beings cannot be separated from the constitutive communities they are born into."[80] This distinction has important implications for the ethical and political positions, as well as thoughts about identity, of the authors on either side.

Most thinkers on the communitarian side of the debate, due to their stress on the community, are critical of notions of postnational identities. The nature of this critique can be seen by analysing the communitarian position of David Miller, a pre-eminent political

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[80] Michael Zürn and Pieter de Wilde, "Debating globalization: cosmopolitanism and communitarianism as political ideologies," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 21:3 (2016): 291. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2016.1207741.

philosopher on the communitarian side of the debate. In chapter 2, "In defence of nationality," of his book *Citizenship and National Identity*, Miller offers an overview of his position. Central to his position is the claim that national identity serves to bind people in a certain area to others in the same area, and that without "these loyalties we would be cast adrift in a region of great moral uncertainty."[81] Miller thus argues for a form of nationalist form of communitarianism, and he does so by defending three connected claims.

Miller claims, first, that belonging to a national grouping may be part of an individual's personal identity.[82] This corresponds to the intuitive idea that when someone is asked to give an account of who they are, they will often include a reference to their nationality in their response. Miller acknowledges, however, that while this may be the case, it does not have to be. The second claim that Miller makes is that of normative 'bounded communities.' Because nations include people from within a territory and exclude those on the outside of it, moral duties to one's countrymen are stronger than those toward people outside the community.[83] Thirdly, communities in a certain territory have a good claim to a right to political self-determination. This idea seems to underly the nation-state, but it does not presuppose it. According to Miller, other political configurations can have equally valid claims to sovereignty.[84]

Subsequently Miller explains in more detail what the kind of national identity he espouses entails. He wants to defend an idea of national identity as

"[1] constituted by mutual belief, [2] extended in history, [3] active in character, [4] connected to a particular territory, and [5] thought to be marked off from other communities by its members' distinct traits."[85]

I will now discuss these aspects, analysing them from the standpoint of the theory of narrative political identity as worked out in the previous chapters.

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[81] David Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 40.

[82] Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity*, 27.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., 30-1.

Nationality and narrative identity

For Miller, national identity is first determined by the belief of multiple people in their shared political identity. This amounts to saying that national identity is at least partly fictional, in concurrence with the narrative account of personal and political identity. As discussed in 2.2, different individuals come together by identifying with the same contingent factors, emplotting those as part of their shared story, and in determining the story determining who they are. The story may include all sorts of references, to historical situations, national myth, or shared prospects.

If these references determine the identity of the group, then Miller's fifth element, that of characteristics thought to differentiate the group from other groups result from this same process. It is important to stress that these traits are *thought* to distinguish a group from other groups, without there needing to be biological or other substantial differences between the groups. Miller acknowledges that the traits differentiating groups can be cultural, like "shared values, shared tastes or sensibilities."[86] These traits are thus not set in stone, but over time can change or become the subject of negotiation. Representations of these traits to members of the group and to members of other national or other groupings help constitute such a national identity, and these groups all interpret the representations in ways that they see fit.

The extension in history of a national identity, as in Miller's second element, is based on the work of previous generations, which has led up to the identity as it is currently conceived and extends it into the future. "Because our forebears have toiled and spilt their blood to build and defend the nation, we who are born into it inherit an obligation to continue their work, which we discharge partly towards our contemporaries and partly towards our descendants."[87] Because of the inherited aspect of national identity, there are certain obligations to continue its existence. Therefore, the members ascribing to such a national identity have special duties toward both their current and future fellow nationals.

This argument too can coexist with narrative identity theory. A story comes from somewhere, it is historically situated. These idem-aspects of identity determine the possibilities for the current and future narrative of a national identity. Furthermore, the adherence to a story shared with others may very well create some obligations toward those others. It is not immediately clear whether this is the case and on what basis, however, and in part 4.3. I will investigate what Ricoeur has to say about this.

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[86] Ibid., 30.

[87] Ibid., 29.

The third element in Miller's description is that of the active character of national identity. He describes national identity as an active identity because it shapes communities that do and decide things together.[88] Interestingly, the idea of an active national identity seems to include the possibility of a nation distancing itself from its past. It entails that a national identity is not only constituted causally by its past but involves the initiative to make active choices to discard elements or incorporate new elements. In this sense, there is an ipse-aspect to national identity as well as an idem-aspect.

So far, national identity is a prime example of a narratively construed political identity with both ipse- and idem-aspects. However, by returning to Arendt's notion of action, a problem emerges. There is a tension in the notion of an active *national* identity: since action always establishes relations, it is boundless, whereas national identity as Miller envisions it is explicitly bounded. An example of this is climate change; the actions of past and current national groupings have an extensive impact on current and future groups, irrespective of their contribution to the problem. This is to say that actions by national communities may stretch far beyond the boundaries of the acting national community, or in terms employed by both Ricoeur and Arendt: action has its actors and its sufferers. Identities constitute themselves by acting in the public sphere, but the consequences of their self-revealing actions have an impact on other identities.

Miller's fourth claim, that national identities are bound to a particular territory, is also partly problematic from the perspective of narrative identity. There is no reason to assume that identifications with certain territorial areas cannot be part of the story of a collective. In fact, the case of the dispute between Northern Macedonia and Greece is an example involving the identification with an ancient culture partially based on the location of the contemporary countries on or near the site of the territory of ancient Macedonian culture. The same case, however, shows the arbitrariness involved in determining where exactly these areas were, are and should be. Different groupings may claim the same territorial identification, and only by accepting the partial nature of those claims can such a dispute be solved.

The previous paragraphs show that political identity is bound to contextual factors, but not in the way that communitarianism supposes it to be. Whereas different political identities may be structured in the same way, through subscribing to a certain narrative, the contents or identifications of these stories can vary to a large extent. The identifications that

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[88] Ibid.

are possible for a collective to emplot into their narrative are dependent on the historical and causal context to some extent. This leaves little room for universally applicable identifications. On the other hand, the theory of narrative political identity points out the problematic nature of where communitarians draw their boundaries for inclusion. Narrative political identity, by standing between universalism and contextualism, thus also stands in between communitarianism and cosmopolitanism.

Problems of national identity

Miller's idea of nationality as possibly being one part of a person's personal identity shows one limitation of his plea for nationalism: it is only - potentially - a *part* of the story we tell ourselves of who we are. From a narrative perspective, there is no reason why ascribing to a story of national identity should have more important ramifications than identifying with another story, like for example that of being religious or being a Berliner. For this reason, it is not clear why duties towards members of the same national identity should be stronger than duties to persons ascribing to the same regional or religious identity. National identity may be an important political identity to identify with, but it does not have to be, and it can coexist with other identifications.

Furthermore, there is the problem of nationalism and plurality. Miller points to this problem himself: "national identities are always in practice biased in favour of the dominant cultural group, the group that historically has dominated the politics of the state."[89] This passage in effect reflects Arendt's concern that plurality is easily undermined by dominant groupings. Miller's solution is that national identities should do away with exclusive elements, but this might be hard to accomplish on a practical level. Ricoeur's model of linguistic hospitality applies to this difficulty and will be discussed in 4.3.

The examination of national identities through the lens of narrative identity theory shows that in some respects national identity is a good example of a narratively construed political identity. It is constituted by emplotment, involves representation, and involves idem- and ipse-aspects. This corresponds to the idea that of the several narratives of political identity a person can ascribe to, nationality is often one.

There are three main problems with national identity. First, the boundedness that national identity presupposes is problematic because action and its consequences do not stop at borders. Secondly, the contingency of identifications allows different groups to emplot the

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[89] Ibid., 34.

same identifications in their own, partial ways. Thirdly, national identity as the dominant identification in a certain area can exclude other identities from effectively appearing in the public sphere. A national identity remaining self-conscious of its partiality in drawing boundaries and of the influences on other groupings of its actions and of its dominant position, could escape these problems. However, postnational identities are better suited for this purpose.

4.2. Postnational identity and narrative theory

I have just discussed the implications of a narrative understanding of political identity for Miller's idea of nationalism. This analysis shows that national identity can be very well conceived as a narratively construed political identity, but this perspective also highlights shortcomings of political identities bound to national communities like partiality, the boundless nature of actions, and the endangerment of plurality, that need to be addressed. Postnational political identities, I propose, are narratively construed like national and other political identities, and are well-suited to address these shortcomings.

With the declining importance of nation-states in an interconnected, globalized world, thinkers often associated with cosmopolitan political theory have started discussing the viability of postnational alternatives.[90] Postnationalism can be conceived in many ways, but I want to argue here for narratively construed postnational identities.[91] Essentially, the construction of political identity by emplotting contingent identifications into a shared story applies here as well as in case of other political identities.

Globalisation and the resulting intermingling of cultures enables people to identify with more different narratives than those tied to their national affiliations. Some of these identities are not bound to any territory whatsoever, or to a large area comprising different countries or cultures, and these can appropriately be called postnational. Movements like La Via Campesina are examples of this. This movement unites people from all over the world in a struggle for certain main issues, like resource access, the rights of peasants, agrarians and

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[90] See for example Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays,* ed. and trans. Max Pensky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

[91] The term 'transnationalism' is also used, but often means something like 'transferred from one country or culture to another.' See Victor Roudometof, "Transnationalism, Cosmopolitanism and Glocalization," in *Current Sociology* vol. 53 iss. 1 (2005). https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392105048291.

women, and against capitalist excesses.[92] Interestingly, as some of the problems they face are exacerbated by globalisation, their response is also to unite people globally.

I want to argue that this organisation can be understood as representing a postnational political identity with which persons from all over the world can identify. This identity is constituted by the identification with certain elements, like that of being a farmer or peasant and being harmed by the consequences of globalisation or capitalist excesses. La Via Campesina represents the narrative constituted by these emplotments, and individuals can choose to ascribe to it and even actively propagate it.

It is important to highlight the ways in which postnational political identities differ from national political identities. It seems clear that their transcending boundaries is a major departure from national communities. By uniting people from multiple countries or perhaps from all over the world into one political identity, they are equipped to take into account their actions as impacting others worldwide. By acknowledging that the consequences of action are not bound to national territories, they can prevent acting in ways that benefit some locally and short-term whilst negatively impacting others in other areas or at a later date. Cases like global (over)consumption demonstrate the value of this position. If I, for example, identify myself as an environmentalist, and ascribe to a worldwide political narrative represented by organisations like Greenpeace, this postnational awareness is crucial: it encourages me to not consume products that unduly impact people or the environment in other parts of the world or in the future.

Since postnational identities unite people from countries with different political, historical, and economic backgrounds, they are also equipped to safeguard plurality. These postnational narratives overarch a great variety of more localised narratives, and they can only do so by accepting a degree of variation within the group itself. A universal narrative which disregards these differences is unlikely to find many people willing to ascribe to it.

In adopting a particular narrative, however, postnational political identities are partial in their own right. Returning to the previous example, environmentalism as a postnational political identity will likely strive for a world in which the consumption of resources like meat radically decreases. This ideal can contradict with the ideals of other political identities like that of farmers. By choosing one narrative over another, priorities are made. If all these

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[92] Annette Aurélie Desmarais and Paul Nicholson, "La Via Campesina: An Historical and Political Analysis," *La Via Campesina's Open Book: Celebrating 20 Years of Struggle and Hope* (2013): 2-3. Accessed June 8, 2021, https://viacampesina.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/05/EN-10.pdf

narratives are necessarily partial, it is important that they accept this partiality if they are to communicate their differences to others with different identities and negotiate outcomes which all find acceptable. To examine more clearly how different political identities can interact without letting their differences get in the way, I will look at Ricoeur's model of linguistic hospitality.

4.3. Communication and linguistic hospitality

The different identities persons adopt can thus vary wildly. With so many possible identities, is it feasible that even the most divergent identities overcome their differences to some extent, and acknowledge their partiality, to peacefully negotiate shared outcomes? If not, these differences may result in conflicts and thereby endanger the continued existence of some identities in the public sphere. Paul Ricoeur offers a suggestion on how we should envision peaceful communication between different groups by analysing translation and its ethical implications in his posthumously published book *On Translation*.

Contemplating the basis of translation, Ricoeur navigates between two theoretical alternatives: either languages are impossible to translate into one another, or there is a universal basis on which all languages can be translated. As both options are problematic, Ricoeur contents himself with the practical fact that we do translate.[93] Aside from translating for some purpose, furthermore, he thinks we have a desire to translate; "a desire that relates to *Bildung* and the broadening of one's horizon."[94]

Translation always involves appropriating some linguistic elements foreign to oneself and finding a way to express these elements in one's own language, which Ricoeur describes as "bringing the reader to the author, bringing the author to the reader, at the risk of serving and of betraying two masters."[95] There is a danger involved of either misinterpreting the words of the other or of giving up a part of oneself to make room for the other. Ricoeur proposes to adopt the model of what he calls *linguistic hospitality* in an ethical sense. The model of translation shows the value of accepting elements of an other, or of someone foreign, into one's own community.

In the case of divergent identities, it means bridging the gaps between them, and being open to the other as different. An important part of this is what Miller called doing away with

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[93] Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, trans. Eileen Brennan (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 14.

[94] Ibid., 21.

[95] Ibid., 23.

exclusive elements of, in his theory, national identities, but it is not limited to national identities. The paradigm of linguistic hospitality involves accepting commensurability between identities, because identities, like languages, are not closed systems.[96] With enough effort, an understanding can be reached - just as languages with different origins can be made understandable to one another.

Translation can thus serve as a model for the communication of different identities, a model through which it becomes clear that identities are never so different that they cannot find some common ground. This is not to say that overcoming differences between different groups will always be easy, or will in practice always succeed, but that it is at least possible. Dries Deweer describes this as "the risky but hopeful ambition of bringing the self and the other closer together."[97] An ethical equivalent of linguistic hospitality should be aimed at when collective decision-making or safeguarding plurality requires so.

This concept is especially apt in case of identities transcending the nation scale, as Ricoeur demonstrates in his article "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe." Linguistic hospitality is described as part of the political imagination needed to integrate the plurality of nations into Europe.[98] Ricoeur here conceptualises the model of linguistic hospitality as a way to combine or integrate identity and alterity: "to translate a foreign culture into the categories of one's own presupposes … a preliminary transference to the cultural milieu governed by the ethical and spiritual categories of the other."[99] This citation refers, once again, to the value of including the other into one's ethical considerations, an important value as political identities, just like the consequences of action, transcend borders.

The above paragraph discusses the model of linguistic hospitality in relation to Europe, a geographic region in which the different national identities admittedly have some cultural overlap. In the case of postnational identities like the one Via Campesina represents, their divergence from other identities on a local, regional or global scale could make fruitful and non-violent interaction harder than that between different national identities. In any case, however, an effort should still be made to see things from the other party's perspective, and it

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[96] Dries Deweer, "Communication, Translation and the Global Community of Persons," *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricoeur Studies* vol. 6 no. 1 (July 2015): 51. https://doi.org/10.5195/errs.2015.277.

[97] Deweer, "Communication, Translation and the Global Community," 50.

[98] Paul Ricoeur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," 3-5. The other two models Ricoeur describes in this article for the further construction of Europe are the 'model of the exchange of memories,' and the model of forgiveness.

[99] Ricoeur, "Reflections on a New Ethos," 5.

should be practically possible to overcome differences to such an extent as to make communication possible.

4.4. Challenges to narrative identity

I will now discuss two objections to this account of narratively construed political identities. Both will be addressed first with a theoretical reply based on Ricoeur, and then with a practical reply considering the possibilities of the public sphere. The first important objection to consider concerns the voluntariness of identifications. I have spoken about identities as developed by persons emplotting events into a coherent narrative, suggesting that this is a voluntary process in which choice is involved. Some identifications, one might object, are forced upon people instead of voluntarily chosen. Those living in theocracies, for example, often have little choice but to adhere to the state religion. Discarding this identification, if one would wish to do so, could be met with repercussions, so how voluntary is it?

The key to a theoretical response to this objection is that all identifications are based to some extent on both ipse- and idem-aspects, and on a combination of constraint and freedom. Having to identify with a narrative because political, historical or familial pressures urge or even coerce one to is based on idem-aspects; reactions like 'we have always been … so that is not going to change now' refer to these aspects that members of collectives have in common, the things that make them the same to some extent. In this sense, there are always some idem-factors that constrain the possibilities of an individual to identify with certain narratives.

On the other hand, there is always a choice whether one regards these aspects as actually belonging to one's identity. Someone can comply with the rituals derived from the idem-aspects of a collective identity, but in private regard them as unimportant, or as a necessary evil. This choice derives from the ipse-aspect of identity, the possibility to actively discard old identifications or choose new ones. Seen in this light, there is always a combination of constraint and freedom at work: constraint because of the historical, political, biological etc. context of an individual or a group, and freedom because a degree of choice to discard old elements or incorporate new ones into one's identity always remains. This

combination of freedom and constraint is not limited to situations in which persons are actively coerced to identify with certain narratives but holds in all cases.[100]

Note that this does not solve the problems for those pressured to identify with a narrative they might not want to identify with. There are, however, some signs that more and more groups can express themselves in the public sphere. Benhabib gives some examples of the expansion of the public in Arendt's conception of the public sphere over the years. These concern identities finding their way to the political agenda even if they formerly could not.

> "The emancipation of workers made property relations into a public-political issue; the emancipation of women has meant that the family and the so-called 'domestic-intimate' sphere become political issues; the attainment of rights by non-White and non-Christian post- and neo-colonial peoples has put cultural questions of collective self- and other-representations on the agenda."[101]

In an influential article on the public sphere, Nancy Fraser uses the term *subaltern counterpublics*[102] to describe how such groups seeking emancipation and participation create their own publics as opposed to trying to fit into the dominant narrative.[103] She contends that in societies with dominant and subordinate groups, establishing multiple publics "help[s]

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[100] This corresponds to an early work of Ricoeur translated as *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, in which he aims to reconcile the voluntary and the involuntary. Regarding decisions, he shows the freedom to decide new things, the voluntary, to be dependent on contextual, involuntary, factors. In the words of translator Erazim V. Kohák: "the choosing will does not create novelty *ex nihilo*, but appropriates the involuntary into the process as the willed motive of …" Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. Erazim V. Kohák (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), xix.

[101] Benhabib, "The Embattled Public Sphere," 5.

[102] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* No. 25/26 (1990), 67. https://doi.org/10.2307/466240.

[103] Scholars like Craig Calhoun and Fraser discuss that 'the public sphere,' at least as Habermas construed it, is not a universal given in which everyone can participate but that it is often exclusionary. Fraser argues, therefore, for a "plurality of competing publics," and Calhoun for seeing "the always plural but not necessarily discrete public spheres [] as products of social struggles, institutional formations, or culture." These conceptions highlight the formation of alternative publics or public spheres even if one cannot participate in the larger public sphere or fit the national narrative. Craig Calhoun, "The Public Sphere in the Field of Power," *Social Science History*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Fall 2010), 329. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0145553200011287. Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 61.

expand discursive space."[104] Establishing alternate publics and identities from a subordinate position can thus lead to more participation and can be a way to create space for more political identities to express themselves on a voluntary basis.

A second objection applying especially to postnational political identities is that the communication and negotiation between different identities on a postnational scale seems to require global democracy. The main point is that, as I have argued in 3.1., a healthy public sphere in which communication between groups adhering to different identities can take place necessitates some democratic political characteristics. These are for example equal access to information, equal rights of expression and the right to organise groups – a combination of factors I have (reductively) discussed as democratic equality. What of the seeming disregard for the public sphere in some non-democracies? Does it not undermine the possibility for people to adhere to and express their political identities?

The theoretical answer to this objection is similar to the previous one. There is a combination of constraint and freedom which determines the possibilities for persons to express, or to representatively establish, their political identities. In a situation where the constraining factors are great, these possibilities are reduced, but not entirely gone. In a country in which freedom of speech or equal access to the public sphere is not guaranteed, there are still some possible identifications. Such a lack of democratic equality, however, means that the capacity to act of the plurality of actors in the public sphere is diminished. With the goal of a healthy public sphere in mind, for all identities to express themselves in, these situations can be challenged.

The democratic equality I have outlined as important for a healthy public sphere is not evident in every state, and this diminishes the real possibilities for underrepresented or misrepresented groups to express their political identities in the public sphere. Returning to Arendt's notion of the public sphere, however, shows that the public sphere is in principle possible anywhere people unite in action. It should thus not depend on the state but can even be developed as a counter to the state. Fraser's notion of *subaltern counterpublics* thus applies here as well. Even if the state represses the expression of some political identities, those in dissent can still organise themselves around a common narrative, in the process challenging the one-sidedness of the prevalent narrative.

To counter the objections, then, acknowledging that political identities result from a combination of constraint and freedom is the first step. Seeing that the constraining factors

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[104] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 67.

can be challenged by creating alternative publics is the second step. Regarding postnational identities, these steps are of great importance. A political narrative bridging many countries will often bridge different political systems. Some of these systems may be hostile to a specific postnational identity, but that does not mean that people from within those systems cannot identify with it. They can do so by creating an alternative narrative in which this identification figures irrespective of the political system's hostility.

4.5. Narrative postnational identities

In this chapter, I have tried to make the case for narratively construed postnational political identities. On a narrative account of identity, characteristics or events are emplotted into a coherent narrative. These identities are thus not set in stone; they consist of the emplotment of several events, some of which are fictional, although the basis of these events lie in real causal and historical factors. The interplay of constraints, caused by these contextual factors, and the freedom to deviate from it is at play in every narrative identity. Narrative identification works on multiple levels, like local, national and postnational, and the multiple identities constructed in this way can overlap. An important process by which these identities are constructed, presented to members of a group and to others, and made political, is via representation. A healthy public sphere is necessary for the interaction between different narrative identities and Ricoeur's model of linguistic hospitality offers some insight into the ethics that can guide such interaction: accepting the other as different.

On this account of identity, postnational identity is not only possible but is a form of identity that can deal with some challenges that more localized forms of identity face. These challenges are that actions do not stop at the border while traditional identities often do, and that too strict interpretations of identity threaten the plurality in societies. Postnational identities have a wider scope than national ones and are better suited to observe the consequences of action on a postnational scale. Because they connect people from different parts of the world with different backgrounds, they are also capable of allowing plurality and difference to exist within their groups. Postnational identities are partial, however, just like other collective identities like nationality, and they need to acknowledge this in their communications and negotiations with people with other identities.

Postnational political identities will likely play a larger role in global politics if the influence of nations continues to wane. By adopting a narrative model of identity, they can do so in a way that allows plurality and difference to exist, while also aiming at their collective

aspirations. Narratives of postnational identity, mobile, relational and translatable as they are, can thus serve a useful role in the public arena and should not be discarded.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis I have analysed how postnational identities can be narratively construed, and how they differ from more traditional political identities such as national ones. I want to start here by answering the research question, 'how can the works of Paul Ricoeur and Hannah Arendt contribute to a theory of postnational political identity which can answer to the communitarian critique of cosmopolitanism?'

In the second chapter, I discussed Ricoeur's account of personal identity and found that it leads to a model of identity which is mobile while acknowledging its background and its relation to others. Accepting responsibility in relation to an other is an aspect frequently stressed in Ricoeur's political thought, an aspect the intertwinement of narratives demonstrates. This insight is guiding for the idea of postnational identities, as these are ideally equipped to consider the relationality involved in identity. Furthermore, Ricoeur's concept of emplotment offers a way to situate identities in relation to identifications, events, and causal chains. The idea that collectives can choose which identifications to emplot and determine the relative value of emplotted elements for who they are, is very important. This makes it possible for people to choose identifications which are not bound to their national narrative, enabling them to identify with postnational narratives instead if they should wish to do so.

In chapter 4, another contribution of Ricoeur to theorising postnational identity was introduced: his model of linguistic hospitality. This model derives an ethical aim from the way translation works, by creating an openness in one's language for aspects of other languages to occupy. The ethical aim is to emulate this openness on the level of identities. It requires different identities to open some space for perspectives not their own, to guarantee their differences do not result in conflicts. Postnational identities can benefit from this, because they already allow a reasonable degree of difference within their group due to the different nationalities included in them. Practicing this openness on a global level is necessary to avoid entrenching differences as sometimes happens with more localised forms of identity.

Hannah Arendt's contribution to the construction of postnational identities is discussed in chapter 3. The public sphere as she conceives it, as a space of appearance, is the medium by which personal identities can become political. The space of appearance is the space in which people actively reveal themselves to others. Arendt conceives mainly the ipse-aspect of identity, as actively choosing to appear in public as such and such, as political. Ricoeur stresses, however, that idem-aspects – characteristics taken over by habit, for

example – play a large role as well in how people can and do present themselves. Arendt's position, however, makes it possible to conceive of any new identity representing itself in the public sphere, on a local, national, or postnational level.

The theory of self-revealing action in the public sphere leads to an interesting position regarding the paradox of representation. The paradox is that those who represent a group cannot accurately represent the group because their positions separate them from their representees. Identities require representation to come across to members of the group and to members of other groups in the public sphere. Representatives thus have an active role in the way their identity is presented to itself and to others. If this is the case, a sort of constructivism appears to be at work; representing a political group to itself and to others plays a role in the story the collective tells about itself. Representatives are then not at odds with their group, but an extension of it responsible in part for its emplotment. They are not the only factors in this process, however, as those who perceive their representations have an interpretative task to fulfil as well.

From the chapters in this thesis, it can be concluded that differences between personal and political identities are not set in stone. While they are based on causal histories, they have the freedom to change the value of elements in their narratives to make room for people with different identities – even if this endeavour involves some risk. Ricoeur's political thought, according to Dauenhauer, contributes to a third way between communitarianism and cosmopolitanism.[105] This thesis has attempted to concretise this third way by arguing for postnational identities which incorporate a plurality of different causal contexts while also providing a common narrative to identify with. In doing so, the communitarian stress on local affiliations can be accepted while more universal identifications and a universal starting point for political deliberation are possible.

Postnational identities are forms of political identity which are particularly relevant in a globalised world. They can unite people from all over the world into a shared narrative, while acknowledging the different contexts these people come from. Thus, if the framework of the nation-state loses some of its significance, it is not necessary to hold on to national identities whatever the cost. This means that shared narratives which many people from different places can identify with can be powerful tools for global or regional cooperation, not just in the integration of Europe, but for worldwide projects and aims as well. In a globalised world with global problems, the solving of which sometimes exceeds the

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[105] Dauenhauer, "Promise and Risk," 312.

capacities of nations, it is promising that nationalities are not the only possible political identities. Far from it: just like a person can read multiple books at the same time, they can ascribe to different political narratives simultaneously. The importance of these identities may vary from person to person but can also vary for a single person over time. Crucially, the importance of identifications can be changed by engaging with others on the basis that our narrative identities are relational and that they can make room for other narrative identities and vice versa.

Further research and limitations

This conception of narrative postnational identities creates some avenues for further inquiry, which I will now discuss. By seeing representation as a crucial feature of identity construction in the space of appearance, the current thesis is in line with recent interest in representative aspects of politics.[106] This leads to some interesting considerations regarding representation. Especially in the case of postnational identities, traditional representation by political parties in national contexts is often impossible.[107] New identities represented on a postnational scale thus require new organisational and institutional contexts. Movements like La Via Campesina show one way of representing a diverse global identity. It can be researched which other ways of representation are possible and effective, and what the consequences of specific forms of representation are for the identities they represent. Furthermore, in the global context, representations often require a medium to reach the people they aim to reach. If representation is important for identity formation, the role of the media in this process should be researched.

The representation of narratives in the public sphere has been shown to offer the possibility for group identities to express themselves. There seems to be an emancipatory potential in this self-revealing through representation. Underrepresented or misrepresented groups of people can reveal their story to others and to themselves in the public sphere to gain a voice in political debate. In a postnational context this creates options for identities that

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[106] On the representative turn, see Sofia Näsström, "Where is the Representative Turn Going?". An example is Nadia Urbinati, *Representative Democracy: Principles and Genealogy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[107] Interestingly, the 'pan-European' progressive political party Volt is active in 29 countries and aims to surpass the national level of politics in favour of politics on a European level. In the countries in which they are present, they are still marginal; it remains to be seen whether this will change in the short term. "About us," Volt. Accessed June 5, 2021, https://www.volteuropa.org/about.

are not traditionally bound to a national territory to communicate and negotiate with other identities on an equal footing. The model of narrative identities represented in the public sphere can be applied to case studies of underrepresented or misrepresented identities to gain new perspectives on this possibility. Studies on alternative conceptions of the public sphere, including plural publics and counterpublics, can also further the examination of the emancipatory potential of different political narrative identities and their interactions.

I want to consider two limitations to the argument. The first is the downside of the quite specific notion of the public sphere I have used. Hannah Arendt's notion of the public sphere as a space of appearance is somewhat idiosyncratic when compared to the more Habermasian notion often used. While the articles mentioned in footnote 103 show that Habermas' conception of the public sphere is not unproblematic, situating the arguments of this thesis in a broader discussion of the public sphere would test its strength and might reveal its weaknesses. While I have discussed the public sphere as a space of appearance and briefly discussed some of its democratic conditions, a more in-depth discussion of the literature on this subject could provide these conditions with more clarity and context.

Another limitation is that I have worked from the assumption that overcoming differences to avoid conflict is desirable or even necessary for politics. Other conceptions of democratic theory, especially agonistic ones like that of Chantal Mouffe, would likely question this need of a politics (relatively) free of conflict. She contends that conflict is an inherent feature of democracy and that it cannot be solved, because it arises from the radically "pluralistic nature of the social world."[108] While the model of linguistic hospitality offers some guidelines to integrate identity and alterity, the objection from this perspective is that some differences are so great that they cannot be overcome. The main question is the following: can and should groups truly be reconciled, overcome their differences, and avoid conflicts? It is unlikely that this question will be conclusively answered, however, and perhaps examining different perspectives is the best we can do.

To conclude, then, there is no reason the decreasing influence of nations and of national identities should lead to moral uncertainty. Political identities built around different elements, especially those disregarding national boundaries, can take over their roles. There will likely never be one political identity with which all humans can identify, but neither is this necessary. Postnational identities, on the other hand, while maintaining their shared and

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[108] Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), 10.

partial identifications, can respect differences within their groups. If they are also open to other identities, they can thus serve as loci of political deliberation on the global stage.

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