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Author(s): Samir Amin and Edward Ousselin

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The Nation: An Enlightened or Fog-Shrouded Concept?

Samir Amin

There is little doubt as to the reality of what is commonly called “the nation.” The mere fact that most people claim to be a part of a specific nation, which means they consider the common traits—real or imaginary—they share with other members of their national group to be more important than what separates them, establishes the incontrovertible social reality designated by the term “nation.”

However, the acceptance of this—obvious—reality in no way implies that one should cease trying to study and understand its nature, limits, and contradictions, much less that one should accept the myths through which such nations live out their existence. For the concept of “nation” has deep mythological roots, among which are the myths that present it as “natural” (thus revealing a biological perception leading to racism), whereas it actually constitutes a social and historical reality. Furthermore, the social and historical trends that led to the creation of such nations have not been identical for all peoples. It is therefore essential to point out the differences in these trends, because these differences explain the deep divisions between the diverse concepts of nationhood.

The concept of “nation,” as with all concepts that define any human community, is based on a fundamental contradiction, which opposes universality—of the human species, of its destiny, of its societal forms—to the particularity of the communities that make up humanity. How do these particularities connect with the requirements of universality, either to clash with it, or on the contrary to merge with it, or even to submit to it (or pretend to do so)? The task of scientific analysis consists precisely in reading the myths, perceptions, and concepts relating to the nation in such a way as to reveal this contradictory relationship.

The concept of universal humanism itself has a history. Humanity did not immediately reach the level of abstraction necessary for the elaboration of universal humanism. Ethnic groups, tribes, clans—how they are called matters little—have long experienced themselves as distinct from one another, to the degree of eliminating any concrete or effective social dimension from their commonality as human beings. Even deities were conceived of as specific to individual groups. The first big wave of what I call the cultural revolutions that inaugurated the tributary age saw the birth of the concept of universality. Here I am referring to the millennium—from 500 BCE to the seventh century CE—during which came into being the great religions (of Zoroaster, of Buddha, Christianity, and Islam)

and the great philosophies (Confucian, Hellenistic) with a universal mission, announcing the common dimension and destiny (whether or not in this life) of all humanity. Of course, this proclaimed universal mission did not achieve any real unification of humanity. The circumstances of tributary societies did not allow it, and humanity reorganized itself into large tributary areas coalesced around their religions—each one with its own, individual universal philosophy (Christendom, *Dar al Islam*, the Hindu world, the Confucian world). Nevertheless, as is the case for all the great revolutionary periods throughout history, the tributary revolution, as I propose to call it (see my *Eurocentrism*), constitutes a projection into the future, producing concepts that are in advance of their time.

The bourgeois revolution of the modern period initiates a second wave of the evolution, broadening the concept of universality, enriching its content. The philosophy of the Enlightenment is the starting point of a movement that culminates in the French Revolution. Among other things, it defines a new content for the concept of nation, radically different from the one by which members of previous tributary communities (Christendom, Islam, the Hindu world, the Confucian world) experienced their lives, their sense of belonging to a community, their perception of universality and of its limits.

The new social order that began to take shape in a corner of Europe during the Renaissance, the conquest of the New World, the mercantilist economies of the absolute monarchies of Western Europe—capitalism, that is—elaborated a new setting for its development, a setting that would become the first of the bourgeois nation-states (particularly England and France). However, the philosophy of the Enlightenment did not posit “national” reality on the basis of any biological myth. To the contrary, it formulated instead a social—that is, non-natural—view of society. It certainly did offer a myth in that regard, but a quite different one from that of common ancestors, the myth of the social contract as the foundation of the nation-state, or of a state or a nation existing only by that contract. The concept of the social contract implicitly included bourgeois individualism and freedom.

Therein lies the greatness of the French Revolution. It founded a new nation, not based on ancestral blood ties or on Christianity, but defined as the nation of free men (at the time, the concept of gender equality was far from commonly accepted) who took part in the Revolution together and who want to live according to its laws. The nation therefore includes all peoples who participate in the Revolution, even if their native tongue is not French (such as the Alsatians), but cannot accept that those who did not participate, whether they be native French speakers or not, should automatically be entitled to belong to the nation. The nation could thus be called an ideology of citizenship. Following its internal logic, the Revolution unhesitatingly integrated Jews into the nation. At its height it abolished slavery in its colonies and elevated Haitian Blacks in revolt to the rank of citizens. The concept of secularism (*la laïcité*) it elaborated goes beyond religious tolerance, attempting to rid the new nation of a reference to the past—that of Christianity, which it merely considers as one

among many personal philosophical opinions, and not as a component of the ideological structure of the society (the religious institution itself being considered as part of the tyranny of the Ancien Régime). An embodiment of this ideological concept of the nation is found in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man, with its right of sanctuary, allowing—at least in theory—any man, whatever his national origin, to proclaim himself a citizen of the new nation. Of course, within this ideological concept the nation is not the affirmation of any particularism over universality, but the expression of universality. The French Revolution, as with all great revolutions—the Russian Revolution being a later example—produced the project of its own expansion through imitation by all peoples.

However, the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and its ultimate expression, the French Revolution, did not achieve the universal aims which they announced. These aims were not an absolute necessity for the capitalist system, whose creation and expansion they accompanied. Not only did the system not necessitate the achievement of these aims, it actually set limits on the proposed universality, which therefore deserves to be called bourgeois universality, as a reference to the real interests it served.

The universal project of the philosophy of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution encountered immovable historical obstacles within the two dimensions of the development of the capitalist system. The first of these dimensions concerns the expansion of capitalism within Europe. This expansion did not come about through bourgeois revolutions such as in England and France, but through the creation of the nation-states of modern Europe. In the case of Germany, the creation of the unified state was achieved without a bourgeois revolution, as a combined result of Prussian military might and the rallying of the old aristocracy of individual German states to Bismarck's national project. The new social hegemony that had allowed capitalist expansion could not under these conditions base its legitimacy on democratic values—which it replaced with nationalism, a concept of the nation based not on a social contract, but on hereditary blood ties. This fog-shrouded national concept had its roots in a founding myth of a very different nature, a myth deriving from the ancient past of Germanic tribes. German sociologists of the nineteenth century even coined a term for this barbaric communal "reality" (or myth): *Gemeinschaft*. This concept of the nation was not experienced as a break with the past but as a continuity, and therefore integrated religious heritage as a component of the national culture. Reactionary and quasi-biological, this concept of the nation, which culminated in the Nazi crimes, has never been eradicated from German social consciousness. This explains the absurd situation whereby, according to German law, a Schmidt, whose ancestors emigrated to Russia three centuries ago, is today considered a German, while the child of an immigrant Turkish family remains a foreigner.

The lack of bourgeois revolutions, outside of England, France, and Holland, has structured the development of capitalism in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe around the creation of nation-states founded on the pre-existence—more imaginary than real—of these nations to the

building of their states. This movement, which I have analyzed elsewhere (*Class and Nation*), led to the disintegration of multinational empires that could have constituted just as favorable an environment for the development of capitalism. The older democratic nations of Western Europe were in turn affected by the spirit of triumphant nationalism resulting from this specific form of capitalistic expansion, especially because at that stage, the capitalist societies of Europe were developing as self-sufficient national entities engaged in ruthless competition. In the context of the clash of imperialisms that resulted from this competition, the national myth as a rallying cry became a potent weapon for the dominant classes.

Of course, neither the myth of seamless historical continuity nor the myth of a revolutionary upheaval that dispenses with the past has any scientific basis. Even those peoples who constitute their nation around such a revolutionary break with the past still inherit cultural patterns that become reintegrated in accordance with new societal needs. This is all the more true when, as in the case of France, the unification process goes back as far as the beginning of the extension of royal authority in the eleventh century, whereas in Germany, unification resulted from more recent, and sudden, events. In France, the assimilation of peoples and the progressive disappearance of local languages (replaced by French) were part of an ancient, long-term process. This process was considerably accelerated and amplified by the school system of the French Republic, whose goal was to build a modern nation based on linguistic and cultural unity.

The history of England offers some obvious similarities with that of France. The fate of the Scots, who have lost even their language, is a reminder that forced assimilation is by no means specific, as is too often said, to French revolutionary policies. However, because it occurred early (seventeenth century), the bourgeois revolution in England, which was also based on the philosophy of the Enlightenment, on democratic values, and on the concept of the social contract, was not as radical in its nature as the French Revolution. The break with the past was therefore less pronounced; and the compromise that preserved the monarchy and the aristocracy allowed a variant of the myth of continuity to survive and gain strength, thus magnifying the Magna Carta (with its feudal, not bourgeois, freedoms) and the Protestant Reformation.

Countries with a bourgeois democratic tradition have always had a propensity to perceive the nation as an open social reality—open to, among others, the assimilation of newcomers. This propensity was reinforced in the case of all countries that were open to large-scale immigration. Such was obviously the case, by definition, of the United States in particular, but also of all American countries and of a few others, such as Australia. It was also true of France, since the end of the nineteenth century, well before immigration became widespread in all of capitalist Europe in the 1960s. Countries with a democratic tradition reacted to this challenge in a relatively generous way—a statement that obviously needs to be qualified. Either they considered the “naturalization” of immigrated foreigners to be normal, at least by the second generation (as was the case in France and Great Britain), or they considered incorporation within the

“adopted country” (the American term that connotes a concept far different from that of assimilation) to be the legitimate means for maintaining the original “cultural” diversity.

There is much to be said about the second option. The defense of the American method, which has become fashionable through the assertion of the “right to be different” denied by assimilationists, leaves unsaid that the accepted differences also constitute the basis for discrimination and for a racially motivated hierarchy of these “communities”—a legacy, in the United States, of slavery as well as of contempt for those not of Anglo-Saxon descent. While the right to be different should not be denied, it is equally important to uphold the right to be similar. The excessive praise of differences often conceals a foggy concept of “culture,” which serves as a substitute for biologically innate and supposedly invariable “specific” traits, whereas history in fact demonstrates the plasticity of cultures.

The second dimension that defines the limits of bourgeois universality concerns the expansion of capitalism in its peripheral areas of Africa and Asia. There was never any intention of extending to these colonies the democratic values of the philosophy of the Enlightenment—whether they be democratic political rights or, as in the case of France, the concepts of secularism (*la laïcité*) and assimilation. In Algeria, for example, contrary to the myth propagated by the Islamic movement, French colonial authorities steered clear of any extension of French law to their Muslim subjects. In fact, they scrupulously respected Islamic religious law, which was only slightly liberalized (especially as concerns the status of women) by the post-independence Algerian government—and not by the French colonialists!

The partial, stunted nature of universality offered by capitalism should not come as a surprise. It was a necessary and logical corollary of the contrast between the central and peripheral areas of worldwide capitalist expansion, which by its very nature tended to polarize these areas economically and socially. Capitalism as a worldwide system, as it really existed, left peripheral areas outside of the active field of values that promoted universality. Socialist and national liberation movements were therefore faced with a crucial challenge.

The socialist movement and its philosophy were thus confronted with nationalism, at first during the nineteenth century in Europe, and later within the context of colonialism. The least one can say is that socialist thought, in all its variants, never retreated from the values of the Enlightenment. Socialist and other left-wing movements, united by deeply held democratic convictions, remain suspicious—with good reason—of right-wing movements that are always tempted to curtail democratic rights when these threaten their class privileges. Socialists, and the Left in general, have therefore always been outraged by nationalist discourse, especially when it uses specious “biological” arguments to divide humanity into mutually hostile “communal” factions. Socialism has always sought to strengthen the awareness and the solidarity of the working classes, and to reduce the devastating effects of nationalist ideologies that are controlled by the exploiting classes.

The errors, blunders, and limits of socialism should be seen in this context. They generally result from excessive optimism, both in the people's ability to get rid of reactionary ideas inherited from the past and in the effectiveness of progress. For example, all socialists—including Marxists—tended to overstate the historical courage of the bourgeoisie, which they thought capable of breaking through the national obstacles to the expansion of capitalism: capable, that is, of forcing national markets (including labor) to fully coalesce into one worldwide market. I have stressed this issue, for I believe the truncated nature of the global market—which excludes labor—lies at the heart of the inherent polarization of the capitalist system. It also defines the historical limits of the bourgeoisie and capitalism, which are incapable of going beyond this border. Herein lie the root causes of the socialist movement's errors concerning the colonial issue.

Believing in progress, and overestimating capitalism's potential, socialists have tended to think its expansion would gradually erase national borders, thus creating, through social homogenization on a global scale, the appropriate conditions for class struggle leading to worldwide socialism. They have therefore always been inclined to encourage the sort of strategies that would speed up such an evolution, by advocating the most democratic means possible to reach this objective. Consequently, socialists have always been inclined to prefer assimilation—through democratic means—to the defense of communal differences and particularities, which are often for them the vestigial remains of an unsavory past. I am stressing this dimension of socialist thought because it is today being undermined by the emphasis on the "right to be different." This "right," which is advocated by schools of thought that are no doubt sincerely democratic in their intentions (especially in Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries), nevertheless remains ambiguous. As I stated above, "differences" are often the basis for discrimination, and the acknowledgment of their legitimacy can be a way to disguise latent racism. Consequently, this assertion of specific traits does not constitute an incontrovertible instance of democratic progress. In addition, it proceeds from the infiltration of dominant conservative ideas within northern European societies.

Confronted with the reality of national identities and with the need to promote class interests, socialists have taken stands that, if not always efficient in terms of reaping immediate political benefits, were nevertheless generous, dignified, ahead of their time. I am thinking here of socialists' attitudes in the European multinational empires, the Austrian Marxists of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Bolsheviks of the Russian Empire. Austrian Marxists sought to preserve the "Great State," but also to rebuild it on the basis of the legitimate and democratic acknowledgment of ethnic, religious, and national distinctions. The Bolsheviks—and later the Third International—went even further toward this goal. They made the maximum possible concessions to purported national realities. They therefore tried to invent the multinational socialist state. What they actually achieved in this context remains of course a question to be analyzed and critiqued. The constitution of the USSR, as well as that of Yugoslavia, which it

inspired, are not only historical documents, but also experiences lived out in all their contradictory realities. The socialism of the Third International was in this instance a direct and extreme descendant of radical democratic thought. It even pursued the logic of this thought to dangerous extremes. Respectful—almost to an absurd point—of the “right to be different,” Bolshevism not only advocated the right to self-determination for “Nations,” but also froze any possible evolution, by enshrining in the constitution the political federation of these nations. This was true of the Soviet as well as of the Yugoslav constitution. Whatever the reality of the USSR—which was doubtless characterized by Russian cultural domination, but also by a redistribution of wealth towards the former colonial peripheral areas, which was never a trait of capitalist imperialism (along with the Yugoslav practice of equal sharing between Serbs, Croats, and others)—it is nonetheless the case that the perceptions of the common ideology of the Third International preserved legitimized “differences” longer than necessary. In this area, capitalism, due to the leveling effects of the market system, would in fact have been far less cautious than communist regimes, which sought to preserve cultures that were menaced with disappearance through the leveling of the market system. Socialism today is paying a high price for this excessive democratic respect for “difference,” whose existence it prolonged. In Yugoslavia, for example, a sizable and growing part of the younger generations no longer felt they belonged to the “historical nations” enshrined in the constitution, asserting instead their “Yugoslav” nationality. However, the internal and external dominant forces, instead of supporting this evolution, endeavored on the contrary to regenerate the national identities that were being transcended. Therefore, this reactionary attitude, on the part of the dominant Yugoslav classes and the forces in Europe that supported them, bears a major share of the responsibility for the regressive evolution that followed, and for the explosion of absurd and criminal jingoism it produced.

The Russian Revolution, just like its French counterpart, can be defined by ideas that were ahead of their time. Ahead, that is, of the objective necessities of an answer to the problems of Russia and the Russian Empire at that time: the right to be different up to and including the right to secede, but also the common, universalistic objective of building a socialist humankind.

Historical socialism thus developed a vision that was ahead of its time, in response to the challenges of nationalism as it existed in Europe. However, when confronted with the problems of the peripheral areas of Asia and Africa, socialism was at a loss. The history of the earlier stages of capitalism, the consequences of integration into the modern capitalist system, the challenges with which these societies were faced, all this was to a great extent beyond the reach of traditional socialist thought, whose origins were Eurocentrist. In the peripheral areas of the system, capitalist expansion created complex social models, thus producing a wide variety of situations, within which national or ethnic factors occupy positions that are themselves often different from those they occupy in the central areas of capitalist expansion. Through a Eurocentrist simplification that I have

criticized elsewhere (*Eurocentrism*), the European experience—its feudalism with its particularities, especially the wide distribution of political power, the resulting concomitance between the development of capitalism, and the creation of what is commonly called modern nations—has often been projected onto the different realities of Asia and Africa. As concerns the peripheral areas of capitalism, on the other hand, I stressed the importance of the following factors:

(i) the wide variety of models of the tributary system found throughout humankind during precapitalist periods, the existence of a fully developed tributary model, characterized by highly centralized political power in certain cases (China and Egypt, for example) and by an advanced system of commercial exchanges in others (the Arab-Islamic world, for example);

(ii) the existence under these conditions of nations that predated capitalism, in the case of strong political centralization that insured the centralization and the redistribution of tributary surpluses (as in China, Egypt, or the Arab world during certain periods), as opposed to multiple divisions along ethnic lines in other cases (in sub-Saharan Africa, for example);

(iii) the importance of the cultural dimension that defined each of the large areas that constituted the precapitalist tributary world (European Christendom, *Dar al Islam*, the Hindu world, the Confucian world), and the more noticeable survival of manifestations of the dominance of tributary ideology, in the peripheral areas of the global capitalist system, that did not undergo such radical cultural and ideological fractures as the Renaissance and the Enlightenment in Europe.

The complexity of the social reality created under these circumstances was necessarily beyond the reach of the dominant Eurocentrist analyses of modern bourgeois thought, and also, to a great extent, of socialist thought. The Second International, which in this domain had inherited (and mostly not transcended) the bourgeois philosophy of the Enlightenment, shared with the bourgeois proponents of capitalism, whether or not they were democratic, the illusion that capitalist expansion must ultimately erase all forms of specificity—which were seen as vestigial forms that would soon fade away. It sought in this way to legitimize its joining in the defense of colonialism and imperialism, “objective agents of progress” (concerning this topic, see Warren, for example). It therefore ignored what I see as the essential aspect of my analysis of capitalism, which is the inherently polarizing nature of its worldwide expansion. The Third International, on the other hand, broke with this ethnocentric tradition and put anti-imperialism at the center of the strategies for struggle that it advocated. The simplifications that it produced in this context should not obscure this positive break, which allowed the beginning of a more accurate analysis of what was at stake, thus rendering possible the delineation of more efficient strategies for liberation.

Whatever their theoretical positions, their preconceptions, their errors, or rather the breakthroughs that allowed them to move forward, the national liberation movements of the peripheral areas of modern

capitalism were confronted with realities that were irreducible, either to the contrasting fundamental class interests that define the capitalist mode of production (the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat) or to the struggle for liberation of "nations" that were assumed to predate capitalism. The national liberation movements were forced to be sufficiently realistic to reject the simplistic views of dominant Eurocentrism.

Concerning the "national" issue, the national liberation movements immediately and instinctively chose the principle of a united front, stressing the unity of peoples struggling against imperialism, going beyond the limited horizons of ethnicity or of diverse communities (such as religious communities), advocating the (re)building of large states, whether old or new. They were certainly not mistaken in making that choice; and the accusations they hurled at the imperialists—of constantly fomenting division—were not without basis. We tend to forget these facts nowadays: that the British spared no effort in their attempts to break up Indian unity (they did manage to create a separate Muslim state, but failed to shatter the unity of the Hindu nations of India); that the French and the British certainly did their utmost to balkanize Africa and the Arab Middle East; etc.

That being said, the concepts advocated by the national liberation movements in order to legitimize their attempts at unity differed greatly from one wing of these movements to another. On the right, within the conservative nationalist wing, the "nation," in whose name came the call for struggle, remained mythical or foggy, at times denying the obvious fact of the ethnic, religious, or linguistic diversity it comprised. Equally foggy was the reference to cultural identities that dominated the former tributary systems, such as Hinduism or Islam, for example. The multiethnic "new nation" in sub-Saharan Africa was largely mythical in nature; as if the Senegalese, Nigerian, or Zairian nationality eliminated the Wolof, Jula, Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Bakongo, or Baluba ethnic groups.

In one way or another, the right-wing ideologies within the national liberation movements, which gave voice to the ambitions of national *bourgeoisies*, were predisposed to follow the philosophies of the fog-shrouded nationalism that the backward part of Europe—the part that had not participated in the Enlightenment—had produced. The ideology of Arab "nationalists" (the *qawmiyin*) provides a perfect example. The "Arab nation" is in this case perceived not as a complex and evolving historical creation, but as an intrinsic essence, thus quasi-biological—"Arabness" (*al uruba*) on the model of "Germanness." Such a mythological view encourages confusion, for example between this "Arabness" and Islam. One could currently find in the speeches and writings of Arab *qawmiyin* numerous examples of this confusion—"Islam is an inseparable component of Arabness," and so on—which paved the way for the dangerous fundamentalist evolution that later took up the banner of Arab nationalism (following the failure of nationalist strategies aimed at achieving Arab unity). Today, within the Third World, this sort of foggy theory—although no more foggy than its European nationalist counterpart—is certainly not

limited to Arab nationalism. For example, the theory of Negritude is of a similar nature.

However, it would be inaccurate to reduce all discourse on the nation within liberation movements to the fog-shrouded concept that I am analyzing. The left wing of these movements, including its communist component, has for its part always sought to extend the principles of the philosophy of the Enlightenment. This left wing has always defended and respected, in accordance with authentically democratic aims, local identities, religious and linguistic minorities, etc. It also attempted to enhance unity without denying the diversity of its components.

Legitimized in one way or another—through mythological or democratic means—the principle of unity has not been an “empty and false slogan.” Instead, it has most often constituted a positive and progressive reality. On this issue, it is fair to say that the ruling classes of formerly colonized countries have mostly been multiethnic or panethnic. This has been especially true of India and of sub-Saharan Africa.

The period following the Second World War was characterized by the fading of the bourgeois national project, which I have called the “Bandung Project” (a reference to the 1955 Bandung Conference during which the “Non-Aligned” front took shape, along with the goals of modernization and industrialization for the Third World). The erosion of this project marks the collapse of the concept of multiethnic nationalism and the emergence of a new form of ethnicity, which has permeated many nations, as I have written elsewhere (*Class and Nation*). The mechanism of this crisis of the state is almost always identical. The crisis leads to a sharp reduction of the surplus that is controlled by the ruling classes, and which normally allows their continuous expansion through the absorption of new groups that benefit from economic growth and the socioeconomic opportunities it offers. This severe decline in the size of the surplus deprives the ruling class of the legitimacy that had constituted the basis for its power—that is, that it had brought about continuous “development.” The unity of this ruling class is shattered, whereupon some of its terrified members attempt to secure new forms of legitimacy through the use of ethnicity, whenever it suits their aims. Africa is not the only part of the world where we can observe such occurrences. Other examples can be found in India, the former Yugoslavia, and the former USSR. The reemergence of ethnicity is therefore not the result of some form of atavism that reappears periodically and explosively. It is rather the result of strategies elaborated by an endangered ruling class, whether it be the Nomenklatura of Eastern European countries or the privileged classes of Third World countries (such as in India or Africa).

Based on the preceding analyses, I will briefly conclude as follows:

Intensified globalization has put an end to the postwar world order (1945-90) without, however, leading to a resolution of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism as a worldwide system, which remains essentially polarizing. The real challenge now facing humankind is to build a new global society based on principles that will allow the gradual elimination of

the disastrous effects of this polarization. This goal—to complete the universality initiated by capitalism—in turn calls into question the concept of the nation, which needs to evolve in a humanistic and democratic direction, thus leading to a resolution of the contradiction between specificity and universality. Initiated by the great ideologies (the universalistic religions of the tributary period), intensified by the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and reinterpreted by socialism, the response to this challenge must now be raised to a new qualitative level, in accordance with the progress of globalization.

Unfortunately, the severe crisis resulting from the collapse of the old world order also generates, out of its confusion and chaos, disastrously regressive evolutions. The renewal of fog-shrouded definitions of the nation, “ethnicism,” the uncritical rehabilitation of “specificity,” and the retreat to narrow communal identities and interests: such are the distinguishing characteristics of these regressive evolutions, which are in the final analysis barbaric and racist in nature. These evolutions should not be legitimized out of respect for “differences” and democratic rights (which would in this case have a merely formal meaning). They should be denounced and gradually displaced by more humane and, in the long run, effective answers. The political action programs required to achieve this aim necessitate a more rewarding form of democracy, in theory and in practice, one that will respect differences but also support the “right to be similar.” These programs also call for the concrete definition of the steps to be taken in this universalistic perspective. In this context, the creation of large regional entities that correspond to the great historical areas (Europe, the former USSR, Latin America, the Arab world, sub-Saharan Africa, India, China, Southeast Asia) is probably a necessary step, which constitutes the most effective answer at this time to the contradiction between specificity and universality.

—trans. by Edward Ousselin

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