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Identities and ideologies in a Global Age

In this presentation, I examine the material conditions of identities and ideologies in the age of globalization. Globalization is perceived here as a crisis of the nation-state caused by the globalization processes and the emergence of the network society. This is made by using Manuel Castells' (b. 1942) analysis of the global network society in the age of information as a vantage point. The presentation leans either on Castells' analysis and background assumptions, or on my extrapolations constructed on their basis.

Contemporary globalization signifies a crisis of the nation-state and nation-state-based international system. The crisis has often been perceived as a disappearing sovereignty of the nation-state and devolution of its role to only one actor among others in the global arena. Along with the withering sovereignty the nation-state's instrumental capacity to control and direct the processes of which function the identification of the people becomes actualized. The sources of power on which identities and ideologies are based move outside of the civil society, which makes the identification-based forces a central transformative social factor.

The network society can be considered as an ideal-type model of the society that is characterized by the primacy of the network form of organization in its core economic, political and cultural processes. By itself the network form of organization is an ahistorical and universal mode of social activity but the development of new technologies has provided it with a new material basis. The technological basis of the new society does not give birth only to the network form of organization but also to processes that are essentially something that can be considered as emergent. Emergent properties are features that cannot be reduced to the lower levels of the system as they appear – 'emerge' – in the system as a function of its increasing level of complexity. Castells proposes his theory of the network society as an appellation for the historical era following industrialism or modernity, instead of, or, as a corrective for, e.g. post-industrialism. On the basis of my analysis I argue that this era can with certain conceptual prerequisites also be called 'emergent modernity', i.e. modernity of which core processes can be characterized as intrinsically emergent phenomena in their essence.

The emergent modernity is a historically specific social reality that has particular kind of consequences for identities and ideologies. I will finish the presentation by sketching some starting points for their assessment.