# Liquid Modernity

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First published in 2000 by Polity Press
in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd

Reprinted 2000, 2001

*Editorial office:*
Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

*Marketing and production:*
Blackwell Publishers Ltd
108 Cowley Road
Oxford OX4 1JF, UK

*Published in the USA by*
Blackwell Publishers Inc.
350 Main Street
Malden, MA 02148, USA



ISBN 0-7456-2409-X
ISBN 0-7456-2410-3 (pbk)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library and has been applied for from the Library of Congress.

Typeset in 11 on 13 pt Sabon
by Ace Filmsetting Ltd, Frome, Somerset
Printed in Great Britain by T.J. International, Padstow, Cornwall

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

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# Community

Differences are born when reason is not fully awake or falls asleep again; this was the unspoken credo which lent credibility to the unclouded trust that post-Enlightenment liberals vested in the human individual's capacity for immaculate conception. We, the humans, are endowed with everything that everybody needs to select the right path which, once selected, would prove to be the same to us all. Descartes's subject and Kant's Man, armed with reason, wouldn't err in their human ways unless pushed or tempted away from the straight, reason-blazed trail. Different choices are the sediment of history blunders – the outcome of a brain damage variously called prejudice, superstition or false consciousness. Unlike the *eindeutig* verdicts of reason which is the property of each single human being, the differences in judgement have collective origins: Francis Bacon's 'idols' reside where people mill and jostle together: in the theatre, in a marketplace, in tribal festivals. To set free the power of human reason meant to liberate the individual from all that.

That credo was forced into the open only by liberalism's critics. There was no shortage of them, charging the liberal interpretation of the Enlightenment's legacy with either getting things wrong or making them wrong. Romantic poets, historians and sociologists joined nationalistic politicians in pointing out that – before humans start flexing their individual brains to write down the best code of cohabitation their reason may suggest – they already have



a (collective) history and (collectively obeyed) customs. Our contemporary communitarians say much the same, only using different terms: it is not the 'disembedded' and 'unencumbered' individual, but a language user and a schooled/socialized person who 'self-asserts' and 'self-constructs'. It is not always clear what the critics have in mind: is the vision of the self-contained individual untrue, or is it harmful? Should liberals be censured for preaching false opinion' or for conducting, inspiring or absolving false politics?

It seems, though, that the current liberal-communitarian *querelle* concerns politics, not 'human nature'. The question is not so much whether setting the individual free from received opinions and collective insurance against inconveniences of individual responsibility does or does not happen – but whether it is good or bad. Raymond Williams noted long ago that the remarkable thing about 'community' is that it always has been. There is commotion around the need of community mainly because it is less and less clear whether the realities which the portraits of 'community' claim to represent are much in evidence, and if such realities can be found, will their life-expectancy allow them to be treated with the kind of respect which realities command. The valiant defence of community and the bid to restore it to the favours denied by the liberals would hardly have happened had it not been for the fact that the harness by which collectivities tie their members to a joint history, custom, language or schooling is getting more threadbare by the year. In the liquid stage of modernity, only zipped harnesses are supplied, and their selling point is the facility with which they can be put on in the morning and taken off in the evening (or vice versa). Communities come in many colours and sizes, but if plotted on the Weberian axis stretching from 'light cloak' to 'iron cage', they all come remarkably close to the first pole.

In so far as they need to be defended to survive and they need to appeal to their own members to secure that survival by their individual choices and take for that survival individual responsibility – all communities are *postulated*; projects rather than realities, something that comes *after*, not *before* the individual choice. The community 'as seen in communitarian paintings' would be tangible enough to be invisible and to afford silence; but then communitarians won't paint its likenesses, let alone exhibit them.

This is the inner paradox of communitarianism. To say 'It is nice to be a part of a community' is an oblique testimony of *not* being a

part, or being unlikely to remain a part for long unless individual muscles are flexed and individual brains stretched. In order to fulfil the communitarian project, one needs to appeal to the selfsame ('self-disencumbering'?) individual choices whose possibility has been denied. One cannot be a bona fide communitarian without giving the devil his due, without on one occasion admitting the freedom of individual choice denied on another.

In the eyes of logicians, this contradiction may by itself discredit the effort to disguise the communitarian political project as a descriptive theory of social reality. For the sociologist, however, it is rather the ongoing (and perhaps rising) popularity of communitarian ideas that constitutes an important social fact calling for explanation/understanding (while the fact that the disguise itself has been so effectively disguised and did not stand in the way of the communitarians' success would not raise many sociological eyebrows – it is much too common for that).

Sociologically speaking, communitarianism is an all-too-expectable reaction to the accelerating 'liquefaction' of modern life, a reaction first and foremost to the one aspect of life felt perhaps as the most vexing and annoying among its numerous painful consequences – the deepening imbalance between individual freedom and security. Supplies of security provisions shrink fast, while the volume of individual responsibilities (assigned if not exercised in practice) grows on a scale unprecedented for the post-war generations. A most salient aspect of the vanishing act performed by old securities is the new fragility of human bonds. The brittleness and transience of bonds may be an unavoidable price for individuals' *right* to pursue their individual goals, and yet it cannot but be, simultaneously, a most formidable obstacle to pursue them *effectively* – and to the courage needed to pursue them. This is also a paradox – one rooted deeply in the nature of life under liquid modernity. Not for the first time paradoxical situations provoke and inspire paradoxical answers. In the light of the paradoxical nature of liquid-modern 'individualization' the contradictory nature of the communitarian response to the paradox should not amaze: the first is an adequate explanation of the other, while the other is a fitting effect of the first.

What born-again communitarianism responds to is a most genuine and poignant issue of the pendulum shifting radically – perhaps



human values. For this reason, the communitarian gospel can count on a large audience-in-waiting. It speaks in the name of millions: *précarité*, as Pierre Bourdieu insists, *est aujourd'hui partout* – it penetrates every nook and cranny of human existence. In his recent book *Protéger ou disparaître*,[1] an angry manifesto against the indolence and hypocrisy of the present-day power elites in the face of 'la montée des insécurités', Philippe Cohen lists unemployment (nine of ten new vacancies are strictly temporary and short term), uncertain old-age prospects and the hazards of urban life as the main sources of diffuse anxiety about the present, the next day and more distant future: absence of security is what unites all three, and the main appeal of communitarianism is the promise of a safe haven, the dream destination for sailors lost in a turbulent sea of constant, unpredictable and confusing change.

As Eric Hobsbawm caustically remarked, 'Never was the word "community" used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in sociological sense became hard to find in real life.'[2] 'Men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting, in which nothing else is certain.'[3] Jock Young supplies a succinct summary to Hobsbawm's observation: 'Just as community collapses, identity is invented.'[4] We may say that the 'community' of the communitarian gospel is not the pre-established and securely grounded *Gemeinschaft* known from social theory (and famously dressed up as a 'law of history' by Ferdinand Tönnies), but a cryptonym for the zealously sought yet elusive 'identity'. And as Orlando Patterson (quoted by Eric Hobsbawm) observed, while people are called to *choose* between competitive identity reference groups their choice is predicated on the strongly held belief that the chooser has absolutely no choice but to choose the specific group to which he or she 'belongs'.

The community of the communitarian gospel is a home writ large (the *family* home, not a *found* home or a *made* home, but a home *into which one is born*, so that one could not trace one's origin, one's 'reason to exist', in any other place): and a kind of home, to be sure, which for most people these days is more a beautiful fairy-tale than a matter of personal experience. (Family homesteads, once securely wrapped by a dense web of routinized habits and custo[illegible]y expectations, have had their breakwaters dismantled and are these days wide open to the tides buffeting the

rest of life.) Being outside the realm of experience helps: the benign cosiness of home cannot be put to a test, and its attractions, as long as they are imagined, may stay unsullied by the less prepossessing aspects of enforced belonging and non-negotiable obligations – the darker colours are largely absent in the palette of imagination.

Being a home writ large also helps. Those locked inside an ordinary, brick-and-mortar home could be struck time and time again by an uncanny impression of being in prison rather than in a safe haven; the freedom of the street beckoned from the outside, tantalizingly inaccessible just as the dreamt-of security of the imagined home tends to be today. If the seductive security of *chez soi* is, however, projected on a big enough screen, no 'outside' liable to spoil the fun is left. The ideal community is a *compleat mappa mundi*: a total world, supplying everything one may need to lead a meaningful and rewarding life. By focusing on what pains the homeless most, the communitarian remedy of the passage (masquerading as return) to a total and totally consistent world is made to look like a truly radical solution of all, present and future, troubles; other worries look small and insignificant by comparison.

That communal world is complete in so far as all the rest is irrelevant; more exactly, hostile – a wilderness full of ambushes and conspiracies and bristling with enemies wielding chaos as their main weapons. The inner harmony of the communal world shines and glitters against the background of the obscure and tangled jungle which starts on the other side of the turnpike. It is there, to that wilderness, that people huddling in the warmth of shared identity dump (or hope to banish) the fears which prompted them to seek communal shelter. In Jock Young's words, 'The desire to demonize others is based on the ontological uncertainties' of those inside.[5] An 'inclusive community' would be a contradiction in terms. Communal fraternity would be incomplete, perhaps unthinkable but certainly unviable, without that inborn fratricidal inclination.

## Nationalism, mark 2

The community of the communitarian gospel is either an ethnic community or a community imagined after the pattern of an ethnic one. This choice of archetype has its good reasons.

[illegible] unlike any other foundation of human unity



has the advantage of 'naturalizing history', of presenting the cultural as 'a fact of nature', freedom as 'understood (and accepted) necessity'. Ethnic belonging spurs into action: one must *choose* loyalty to one's nature – one needs to try hard and with no time to rest to live up to the set model and thus make a contribution to its preservation. The model itself, however, is not a matter of choice. The choice is not between different referents of belonging, but between belonging and rootlessness, home and homelessness, being and nothingness. This is precisely the dilemma which the communitarian gospel wishes (needs) to hammer home.

Second, the nation-state promoting the principle of ethnic unity overriding all other loyalties was the only 'success story' of community in modern times or, rather, the sole entity which made the bid to a community status with any degree of conviction and effect. The idea of ethnicity (and ethnic homogeneity) as the legitimate basis of unity and self-assertion has been thereby given a historical grounding. Contemporary communitarianism naturally hopes to capitalize on that tradition; given the present-day wobbliness of state sovereignty and the evident need for someone to take over the banner falling out of the state's hands, the hope is not entirely unwarranted. Yet it is easy to observe that drawing parallels between the accomplishment of the nation-state and communitarian ambitions has its limits. The nation-state, after all, owed its success to the *suppression of* self-asserting communities; it fought tooth and nail against 'parochialism', local customs or 'dialects', promoting a unified language and historical memory at the expense of communal traditions; the more determined the state-initiated and state-supervised *Kulturkämpfe*, the fuller the nation-state success in the production of a 'natural community'. Moreover, nation-states (unlike the present-day communities-in-waiting) did not sit down to the task bare-handed and would not think of relying just on the power of indoctrination. Their effort had a powerful support in the legal enforcement of official language, school curricula and the unified system of law, which the communities-in-waiting lack and are nowhere near acquiring.

It was argued well before the recent rise of communitarianism that there was a precious gem inside the ugly and prickly carapace of modern nation-building. Isaiah Berlin suggested that there are human and ethically praiseworthy sides to the modern 'homeland' apart from its cruel and potentially gory side. Fairly popular is the

distinction made between patriotism and nationalism. More often than not, the patriotism of that opposition is the 'marked' member of the couple, the unsavoury realities of nationalism being cast as the 'unmarked' member: patriotism, more postulated than empirically given, is what nationalism (if tamed, civilized and ethically ennobled) could be but is not. Patriotism is described through the negation of the most disliked and shameful traits of known nationalisms. Leszek Kołakowski[6] suggests that, while the nationalist wants to assert the tribal existence through aggression and hatred of others, believes that all the mishaps of his own nation are the outcome of a strangers' plot and holds a grudge against all other nations for failing to admire properly and otherwise give its due to his own tribe, the patriot is marked by 'benevolent tolerance of cultural variety and particularly of ethnic and religious minorities', as well as by his readiness to tell his own nation things it would not savour or enjoy hearing. Though this distinction is fine and morally and intellectually laudable, its value is somewhat weakened by the fact that what is opposed here is not so much two options equally likely to be embraced, as a noble idea and an ignoble reality. Most people who wished their appointed brethren to be patriots would in all likelihood decry the features ascribed here to the patriotic stance as evidence of two-facedness, national betrayal or worse. Such features – tolerance of difference, hospitality to minorities and courage to tell the truth, however unpleasant – are most widespread in the lands where 'patriotism' is not a 'problem'; in societies secure enough in their republican citizenship not to worry about patriotism as a problem, let alone to view it as an urgent task.

Bernard Yack, the editor of *Liberalism without Illusions* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), was not therefore out of order when in his polemics against Maurizio Viroli, the author of *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 1995), he paraphrased Hobbes to coin an aphorism. 'Nationalism is patriotism misliked and patriotism, nationalism liked.'[7] Indeed, there are reasons to conclude that there is little else to distinguish between nationalism and patriotism, except our enthusiasm for their manifestations or its absence or the degree of shame-facedness or guilty conscience with which we admit or deny them. It is the naming that makes the difference, and the difference made is mainly rhetorical, distinguishing not the



substance of talked-about phenomena, but the ways we talk about sentiments or passions that are otherwise essentially similar. But it is the nature of sentiments and passions and their behavioural and political consequences that count and affect the quality of human cohabitation, not the words we use to narrate them. Looking back at the deeds of which the patriotic stories tell, Yack concludes that whenever lofty patriotic feelings have 'risen to the level of shared passion' 'it has been a fierce rather than gentle passion that patriots have displayed', and that patriots could display over the centuries 'many memorable and useful virtues, but gentleness and sympathy towards outsiders are not prominent among them'.

There is no denying, though, the significance of the difference in rhetorics, nor its occasionally poignant pragmatic reverberations. One rhetoric is made to the measure of the discourse of 'being', another to that of 'becoming'. 'Patriotism' on the whole pays tribute to the modern creed of the 'unfinishedness', the pliability (more to the point, the 'reformability') of humans: it may therefore declare with a clear conscience (whether or not the promise is kept in practice) that the call to 'close ranks' is an open and standing invitation: that joining ranks is a matter of choices made, and that all that is required is that one makes the right choice and remains loyal to it through thick and thin for ever after. 'Nationalism', on the other hand, is more like the Calvinist version of salvation or St Augustine's idea of free will: it puts little trust in choice – you are either 'one of us' or you are not, and in either case you can do little, perhaps nothing at all, to change it. In the nationalist narrative, 'belonging' is a fate, not a chosen destiny or a life project. It may be a matter of biological heredity, as in the now rather outmoded and unpractised racist version of nationalism, or of cultural heredity, as in the presently fashionable 'culturalist' variant of nationalism – but in either case the matter has been decided well before this or another person started to walk and talk, so that the sole choice left to the individual is between embracing the verdict of fate with both arms and in good faith and rebelling against the verdict and so becoming a traitor to one's calling.

This difference between patriotism and nationalism tends to reach beyond mere rhetoric into the realm of political practice. Following Claude Lévi-Strauss's terminology, we may say that the first formula is more likely to inspire 'anthropophagic' strategies ('eating up' the strangers so that they are assimilated by the body

of the eater and become identical with its other cells, having lost their own distinctiveness), while the second associates more often than not with the 'anthropoemic' strategy of 'vomiting' and 'spitting out' those 'unfit to be us', either isolating them by incarcerating them inside the visible walls of the ghettos or the invisible (though no less tangible for this reason) walls of cultural prohibitions, or by rounding them up, deporting them or forcing them to run away, as in the practice currently given the name of ethnic cleansing. It would be prudent, however, to remember that the logic of thought is seldom binding on the logic of deeds, that there is therefore no one-to-one relation between rhetorics and practices, and so each of the two strategies may be wrapped in either of the two rhetorics.

## Unity – through similarity or difference?

'We' of the patriotic/nationalist creed means people *like us*; 'they' – means people who are *different from us*. Not that 'we' are identical in every respect; there are differences between 'us' alongside the common features, but the similarities dwarf, defuse and neutralize their impact. The aspect in which we are all alike is decidedly more significant and consequential than everything that sets us apart from one another; significant enough to outweigh the impact of the differences when it comes to taking a stand. And not that 'they' differ from us in every respect; but they differ in one respect which is more important than all the others, important enough to preclude a common stand and render genuine solidarity unlikely whatever the similarities that make us alike. It is a typically either/or situation: the boundaries dividing 'us' from 'them' are clearly drawn and easy to spot, since the certificate of 'belonging' contains just one rubric, and the questionnaire which those applying for the identity card are required to fill in contains but one question and a 'yes or no'-answer.

Let us note that the question of which of the differences is 'crucial' – that is, which one is the kind of difference that matters more than any similarity and makes all common feature seem small and insignificant (the difference that makes the hostility-generating division an open-and-shut case well before the start of the meeting in which the eventuality of unity could be discussed) –



is minor and above all derivative, most often an afterthought, rather than the starting point of argument. As Frederick Barth explained, borders do not acknowledge and register the already existing estrangement; they are drawn, as a rule, before the estrangement is brought about. First there is a conflict, a desperate attempt to set 'us' apart from 'them'; then the traits keenly spied out among 'them' are taken to be the proof and the source of a strangehood that bears no conciliation. Human beings being as they are multi-faceted creatures having many attributes, it is not difficult to find such traits once the search has started in earnest.

Nationalism locks the door, pulls out the door-knockers and disables the doorbells, declaring that only those who are inside have the right to be there and settle there for good. Patriotism is, at least on the face of it, more tolerant, hospitable and forthcoming – it passes the buck to those who ask admission. And yet the ultimate result is, more often than not, remarkably similar. Neither the patriotic nor the nationalist creed admits the possibility that people may belong together while staying attached to their differences, cherishing and cultivating them or that their togetherness, far from requiring similarity or promoting it as the value to be coveted and pursued, actually *benefits* from the variety of life-styles, ideals and knowledge while adding more strength and substance to what makes them what they are – and that means, to what makes them different.

Bernard Crick quotes from the *Politics* of Aristotle his idea of a 'good *polis*', articulated in defiance of Plato's dream of one truth, one unified standard of righteousness, binding all:

> There is a point at which a polis, by advancing in unity, will cease to be a polis; but will none the less come near to losing its essence, and will thus be a worse polis. It is as if you were to turn harmony into mere unison, or to reduce a theme to a single beat. The truth is that the polis is an aggregate of many members.

In his commentary, Crick advances the idea of a kind of unity which neither patriotism nor nationalism is eager to support and more often than not would actively resent: a kind of unity which assumes that civilized society is inherently pluralistic, that living together in such a society means negotiation and conciliation of 'naturally different' interests, and that 'It is normally better to

conciliate differing interests than to coerce and oppress them perpetually:'[8] in other words, that the pluralism of modern civilized society is not just a 'brute fact' which can be disliked or even detested but (alas) not wished away, but a good thing and fortunate circumstance, as it offers benefits much in excess of the discomforts and inconveniences it brings, widens horizons for humanity and multiplies the chances of life altogether more prepossessing than the conditions any of its alternatives may deliver. We may say that, in a stark opposition to either the patriotic or the nationalistic faith, the most promising kind of unity is one which is *achieved*, and achieved daily anew, by confrontation, debate, negotiation and compromise between values, preferences and chosen ways of life and self-identifications of many and different, but always self-determining, members of the *polis*.

This is, essentially, the *republican* model of unity, of an emergent unity which is a joint achievement of the agents engaged in self-identification pursuits, a unity which is an outcome, not an *a priori* given condition, of shared life, a unity put together through negotiation and reconciliation, not the denial, stifling or smothering out of differences.

This, I wish to propose, is the sole variant of unity (the only formula of togetherness) which the conditions of liquid modernity render compatible, plausible and realistic. Once the beliefs, values and styles have all been 'privatized' – decontextualized or 'disembedded', with the sites offered for re-embedding reminiscent more of motel accommodation than of a permanent (mortgage loan repaid) home – identities cannot but look fragile, temporary and 'until further notice', and devoid of all defences except the skills and determination of the agents to hold them tight and protect them from erosion. The volatility of identities, so to speak, stares the residents of liquid modernity in the face. And so does the choice that logically follows it: to learn the difficult art of living with difference or to bring about, by hook or by crook, such conditions as would make that learning no longer necessary. As Alain Touraine put it recently, the present state of society signals 'the end of definition of the human being as a social being, defined by his or her place in society which determines his or her behaviour or action', and so the defence by social actors of their 'cultural and psychological specificity' cannot but be conducted with 'conscious-



the individual, and no longer in social institutions or universalistic principles'.[9]

The news concerning the condition about which theorists theorize and philosophers philosophize is daily hammered home by the joint forces of the popular arts, whether appearing under their proper name of fiction or disguised as 'true stories'. As the viewers of the film *Elizabeth I* are informed, even being the Queen of England is a matter of self-assertion and self-creation; being a daughter of Henry VIII takes a lot of individual initiative backed by cunning and determination. To force the quarrelsome and incalcitrant courtiers to kneel and bow, and above all to listen and obey, the future Gloriana needs to buy a lot of paint for make-up and change her hair-style, the head-dress and the rest of her attire. There is no assertion but self-assertion, no identity but made-up identity.

It all boils down, to be sure, to the strength of the agent in question. The defence weapons are not uniformly available, and it stands to reason that weaker, poorly armed individuals would seek in the power of numbers redress for their individual impotence. Given the varying width of the universally experienced gap between the condition of the 'individual *de jure*' and the chance to obtain the 'individual *de facto*' status, the same fluid modern environment may – and will – favour a variety of survival strategies. The 'we', as Richard Sennett insists, is nowadays 'an act of self-protection. The desire for community is defensive . . . To be sure, it is almost a universal law that "we" can be used as a defense against confusion and dislocation.' But – and this is a most crucial but – when that desire for community 'is expressed as rejection of immigrants and other outsiders', it is because

> current politics based on the desire for refuge takes aim more at the weak, those who travel the circuits of the global labour market, rather than at the strong, those institutions which set poor workers in motion or make use of their relative deprivation. The IBM programmers . . . in one important way transcended this defensive sense of community, when they ceased blaming their Indian peers and their Jewish president.[10]

'In one important way,' perhaps – but, let me add, in one only, and not necessarily the most significant either. The impulse to with-

universal; it is only the ways to act on that impulse that differ, and they tend to differ in direct proportion to the means and resources available to the actors. The better-off, like the IBM programmers, comfortable in their cyberspatial enclave but much less immune to the vagaries of fate in the difficult to 'virtualize', physical sector of the social world, can afford the costs of high-tech moats and drawbridges to keep the dangers at arm's length. Guy Nafilyah, the head of a leading developer company in France, observed that 'The Frenchmen are uneasy, they are afraid of neighbours, except those who resemble them.' Jacques Patigny, the president of the National Association of the Accommodation Renters, concurs, and sees the future in 'peripheral closure and filtering of access' to residential areas by magnetic cards and guards. The future belongs to 'archipelagos of islands dotted along the axes of communication'. The cut-off and fenced-off, truly exterritorial residential areas equipped with intricate intercom systems, ubiquitous video-surveillance cameras and heavily armed guards on twenty-four-hours-a-day beats are cropping up all around Toulouse, as they have done already some time ago in the USA and as they do in ever growing numbers all over the affluent part of the fast globalizing world.[11] The heavily guarded enclaves bear a remarkable resemblance to the ethnic ghettoes of the poor. They differ, though, in one seminal respect: they have been freely chosen as a privilege one is expected to pay an arm and leg for. And the security men who guard the access have been legally hired and so carry their guns with the full approval of the law.

Richard Sennett offers a psycho-sociological gloss to the trend:

> The image of the community is purified of all that may convey a feeling of difference, let alone conflict, in who 'we' are. In this way the myth of community solidarity is a purification ritual . . . What is distinctive about this mythic sharing in communities is that people feel they belong to each other, and share together, *because they are the same* . . . The 'we' feeling, which expresses the desire to be similar, is a way for men to avoid the necessity of looking deeper into each other.[12]

Like so many other modern undertakings of public powers, the dream of purity has been in the era of liquid modernity deregulated and privatized; acting on that dream has been left to private – local group – initiative. The protection of personal safety is now a



personal matter, and local authorities and local police are at hand to help with their advice, while land developers would gladly take over the worry from those who are able to pay for their services. Measures undertaken personally – singly or severally – need to be on a par with the urge which prompted their search. According to the common rules of mythical reasoning, the metonymical is reforged into the metaphorical: the wish to repel and push back the ostensible dangers adjacent to the endangered body is transmogrified into the urge to make the 'outside' similar, 'alike' or identical with the outside, to remake the 'out there' after the likeness of the 'in here'; the dream of the 'community of similarity' is, essentially, a projection of *l'amour de soi*.

It is also a frantic bid to avoid confrontation with vexing questions without a good answer: the question whether that self, frightened and lacking in self-confidence, is worth loving in the first place, and whether it deserves therefore to serve as the design for refurbishing its habitat and as the standard to assess and measure the acceptable identity. In a 'community of similarity' such unpleasant questions won't, we hope, be asked, and so the credibility of the safety obtained through purification will never be put to the test.

In another place (*In Search of Politics*, Polity Press, 1999) I have discussed the 'unholy trinity' of uncertainty, insecurity and unsafety, each one generating anxiety all the more acute and painful for being unsure of its provenance; whatever its origin, the accumulating steam desperately seeks an outlet, and with the access to the sources of uncertainty and insecurity blocked or out of reach, all the pressure shifts elsewhere, to fall ultimately on the tantalizingly thin and friable valve of bodily, domestic and environmental safety. As a result, the 'safety problem' tends to be chronically overloaded with worries and cravings it can neither carry away nor unload. The unholy alliance results in the perpetual thirst for more safety, a thirst which no practical measures can quell since they are bound to leave the primary and perpetually prolific sources of uncertainty and insecurity, those main suppliers of anxiety, untouched and intact.

## Security at a price

Going through the writings of the born-again apostles of the communitarian cult, Phil Cohen concluded that the communities they extol and recommend as the cure for their contemporaries' life troubles are more like orphanages, prisons or mad houses than sites of potential liberation. Cohen is right; but the potential for liberation was never the communitarians' concern; the troubles which it was hoped the would-be communities would heal were sediments of the liberation's excesses, of a liberation potential too big for comfort. In the long and inconclusive search for the right balance between freedom and security, communitarianism stood fast on the side of the latter. It also accepted that the two cherished human values are at odds and cross-purposes, that one cannot have more of one without surrendering a bit, perhaps even a large chunk, of another. One possibility which the communitarians will not admit is that broadening and entrenching human freedoms may add to the sum total of human security, that freedom and security may grow together, let alone that each may grow only if growing together with the other.

The vision of community, let me repeat, is that of an island of homely and cosy tranquillity in a sea of turbulence and inhospitality. It tempts and seduces, prompting the admirers to refrain from looking too closely, since the eventuality of ruling the waves and taming the sea has already been deleted from the agenda as a proposition both suspect and unrealistic. Being the only shelter offers the vision an added value, and that value goes on being added to as the stock exchange where other life values are traded grows ever more capricious and unpredictable.

As a safe investment (or, rather, an investment less blatantly risky than others), the value of the community shelter has no serious competitors except, perhaps, the body of the investor – now, unlike in the past, the element of the *Lebenswelt* with an ostensibly longer (indeed, *incomparably* longer) life-expectation than that of any of its trappings and casings. As before, the body remains mortal and so transient, but its mortality-bound brevity seems like eternity when compared with the volatility and ephemerality of all reference frames, orientation points, classifications and evaluations which liquid modernity puts on and takes off the



display windows and shop-shelves. Family workmates, class, neighbours are all too fluid to imagine their permanence and credit them with the capacity of reliable reference frames. The hope that 'we will meet again tomorrow', the belief which used to offer all the reasons needed to think ahead, to act long-term and to weave the steps, one by one, into a carefully designed trajectory of the temporary, incurably mortal life, has lost much of its credibility; the probability that what one will meet tomorrow will be one's own body immersed in quite different or radically changed family, class, neighbourhood and the company of other workmates is nowadays much more credible and so a safer bet.

In an essay which reads today like a letter sent to posterity from the land of solid modernity, Émile Durkheim suggested that only 'Actions which have a lasting quality are worthy of our volition, only pleasures which endure are worthy of our desires.' This was indeed the lesson which solid modernity hammered into the heads of its denizens with good results, but it sounds outlandish and hollow to contemporary ears – though perhaps less bizarre than the practical advice Durkheim derived from that lesson. Having asked what seemed to him a purely rhetorical question, 'Of what value are our individual pleasures, which are so empty and short?', he hastened to put his readers' qualms to rest, pointing out that, fortunately, we are not abandoned to the chase after such pleasures – 'because societies are infinitely more long-lived than individuals', 'They permit us to taste satisfactions which are not merely ephemeral.' Society, in Durkheim's view (quite credible at his time) is that body 'under whose protection' to shelter from the horror of one's own transience.'[13]

The body and its satisfactions have not become *less* ephemeral since the time when Durkheim sang the glory of durable social institutions. The snag, though, is that everything else – and those social institutions most prominently – has now become *more* ephemeral yet than the 'body and its satisfactions'. Length of life is a comparative notion, and the mortal body is now perhaps the longest-living entity around (in fact, the sole entity whose life-expectation tends to increase over the years). The body, one may say, has become the last shelter and sanctuary of continuity and duration; whatever 'long-term' may mean, it can hardly exceed the limits drawn by bodily mortality. It is becoming safety's last line of trenches, trenches which are exposed to constant enemy

bombardment, or the last oasis among wind-swept moving sands. Hence the rabid, obsessive, feverish and overwrought concern with the defence of the body. The boundary between the body and the world outside is among the most vigilantly policed of contemporary frontiers. The body orifices (the points of entry) and the body surfaces (the places of contact) are now the primary foci of terror and anxiety generated by the awareness of mortality. No longer do they share the load with other foci (except, perhaps, the 'community').

The body's new primacy is reflected in the tendency to shape the image of community (the community of certainty-cum-security dreams, the community as the greenhouse of safety) after the pattern of the ideally protected body: to visualize it as an entity homogeneous and harmonious on the inside, thoroughly cleansed of all foreign, ingestion-resistant substances, all points of entry closely watched, controlled and guarded, but heavily armed on the outside and encased in impenetrable armour. The boundaries of the postulated community, like the outer limits of the body, are to divide the realm of trust and loving care from the wilderness of risk, suspicion and perpetual vigilance. The body and the postulated community alike are velvety on the inside and prickly and thorny on the outside.

Body and community are the last defensive outposts on the increasingly deserted battlefield on which the war for certainty, security and safety is waged daily with little, if any, respite. They need now to perform the tasks once divided among many bastions and stockades. More depends on them now than they are able to carry, and so they are likely to deepen, rather than to allay, the fears which prompted the seekers of security to run to them for shelter.

The new loneliness of body and community is the result of a wide set of seminal changes subsumed under the rubric of liquid modernity. One change in the set is, however, of particular importance: the renunciation, phasing out or selling off by the state of all the major appurtenances of its role as the principal (perhaps even monopolistic) purveyor of certainty and security, followed by its refusal to endorse the certainty/security aspirations of its subjects.



## After the nation-state

In modern times, the nation was 'another face' of the state and the principal weapon in its bid for sovereignty over the territory and its population. A good deal of the nation's credibility and its attraction as the warrant of safety and durability has been derived from its intimate association with the state, and – through the state – with the actions aimed at laying the certainty and security of citizens on a durable and trustworthy, since collectively insured, foundation. Under the new conditions little can be gained by the nation from its close links with the state. The state may not expect much from the mobilizing potential of the nation which it needs less and less as the mass conscript armies held together by the feverishly beefed-up patriotic frenzy are replaced by the elitist and coldly professional high-tech units, while the wealth of the country is measured not so much by the quality, quantity and morale of its labour force, as by the country's attractiveness to coolly mercenary forces of global capital.

In a state that is no longer the secure bridge leading beyond the confinement of individual mortality, a call to sacrifice individual well being, let alone individual life, for the preservation or the undying glory of the state sounds vacuous and increasingly bizarre, if not amusing. The centuries-long romance of nation with state is drawing to an end; not so much a divorce as a 'living together' arrangement is replacing the consecrated marital togetherness grounded in unconditional loyalty. Partners are now free to look elsewhere and enter other alliances; their partnership is no longer the binding pattern for proper and acceptable conduct. We may say that the nation, which used to offer the substitute for the absent community at the era of *Gesellschaft*, now drifts back to the left-behind *Gemeinschaft* in search of a pattern to emulate and to model itself after. The institutional scaffolding capable of holding the nation together is thinkable increasingly as a do-it-yourself job. It is the dreams of certainty and security, not their matter-of-fact and routinized provision, that should prompt the orphaned individuals to huddle under the nation's wings while chasing the stubbornly elusive safety.

Of salvaging the certainty-and-security services of the state there seems to be little hope. The freedom of state politics is relentlessly

eroded by the new global powers armed with the awesome weapons of exterritoriality, speed of movement and evasion/escape ability; retribution for violating the new global brief is swift and merciless. Indeed, the refusal to play the game by the new global rules is the most mercilessly punishable crime, which the state powers, tied to the ground by their own territorially defined sovereignty, must beware of committing and avoid at all cost.

More often than not, the punishment is economic. Insubordinate governments, guilty of protectionist policies or generous public provisions for the 'economically redundant' sectors of their populations and of recoiling from leaving the country at the mercy of 'global financial markets' and 'global free trade', would be refused loans or denied reduction of their debts; local currencies would be made global lepers, speculated against and pressed to devalue; local stocks would fall head down on the global exchanges; the country would be cordoned off by economic sanctions and told to be treated by past and future trade partners as a global pariah; global investors would cut their anticipated losses, pack up their belongings and withdraw their assets, leaving local authorities to clean up the debris and bail out the victims out of their added misery.

Occasionally, though, the punishment would not be confined to the 'economic measures'. Particularly obstinate governments (but not too strong to resist for long) would be taught an exemplary lesson intended to warn and frighten their potential imitators. If the daily, routine demonstration of the global forces' superiority appeared insufficient to force the state to see reason and to cooperate with the new 'world order', the military might would be deployed: the superiority of speed over slowness, of the ability to escape over the need to engage, of exterritoriality over locality, all would be spectacularly manifested with the help, this time, of armed forces specialized in hit-and-run tactics and the strict separation of 'lives to be saved' and lives unworthy of saving.

Whether as an ethical act the way the war against Yugoslavia was conducted was right and proper is open to discussion. That war made sense, though, as the 'promotion of global economic order by other than political means'. The strategy selected by the attackers worked well as the spectacular display of the new global hierarchy and the new rules of the game which sustain it. If not for its thousands of quite real 'casualties' and a country cast into ruin



and deprived of livelihood and self-regenerative ability for many years to come, one would be tempted to decribe it as a *sui generis* 'symbolic war'; the war itself, its strategy and tactics was (consciously or subconsciously) a symbol of the emergent power relationship. The medium was indeed the message.

As a teacher of sociology, I kept repeating to my students, year in, year out, the standard version of the 'history of civilization' as marked by a gradual yet relentless rise of sedentariness and the eventual victory of the settled over the nomads; it went without further argument that the defeated nomads were, in their essence, the regressive and anti-civilizational force. Jim MacLoughlin has recently unpacked the meaning of that victory, sketching a brief history of the treatment accorded to the 'nomads' by the sedentary populations within the orbit of modern civilization.[14] Nomadism, he points out, was seen and treated as 'characteristics of "barbarous" and underdeveloped societies'. Nomads were defined as primitive, and, from Hugo Grotius on, there was a parallel drawn between 'primitive' and 'natural' (that is, uncouth, raw, pre-cultural, uncivilized): 'the development of laws, cultural progress and the enhancement of civilization were all intimately linked to the evolution and improvement of man–land relations over time and across space'. To make a long story short: progress was identified with the abandonment of nomadism in favour of the sedentary way of life. All that, to be sure, happened at the time of heavy modernity, when domination implied direct and tight engagement and meant territorial conquest, annexation and colonization. The founder and the main theorist of 'diffusionism' (a view of history once highly popular in the empires' capitals), Friedrich Ratzel, the preacher of the 'rights of the stronger' which he thought were ethically superior as much as inescapable in view of the rarity of civilizational genius and commonality of passive immitation, grasped precisely the mood of the time when he wrote at the threshold of the colonialist century that

> The struggle for existence means a struggle for space . . . A superior people, invading the territory of its weaker savage neighbours, robs them of their land, forces them back into corners too small for their support, and continues to encroach even upon their meagre possession, till the weaker finally loses the last remnants of its domain, is literally crowded off the earth . . . The superiority of such expan-

sionists consists primarily in their greater ability to appropriate, thoroughly utilize and populate territory.

Clearly, no more. The game of domination in the era of liquid modernity is not played between the 'bigger' and the 'smaller', but between the quicker and the slower. Those who are able to accelerate beyond the catching power of their opponents rule. When velocity means domination, the 'appropriation, utilization and population of territory' becomes a handicap – a liability, not an asset. Taking over under one's own jurisdiction and even more the annexation of someone else's land imply capital-intensive, cumbersome and unprofitable chores of administration and policing, responsibilities, commitments – and, above all, cast considerable constraint on one's future freedom to move.

It is far from clear whether more hit-and-run-style wars will be undertaken, in view of the fact that the first attempt ended up in immobilizing the victors – burdening them with the cumbersome jobs of ground occupation, local engagements and managerial and administrative responsibilities quite out of tune with liquid modernity's techniques of power. The might of the global elite rests on its ability to escape local commitments, and globalization is meant precisely to avoid such necessities, to divide tasks and functions in such a way as to burden local authorities, and them only, with the role of guardians of law and (local) order.

Indeed, one can see many signals of the tide of 'second thoughts' swelling in the camp of the victors: the strategy of the 'global police force' is subject once more to an intense critical scrutiny. Among the functions which the global elite would rather leave to the nation-states-turned-local-police-precincts a growing number of influential voices would include the efforts to solve gory neighbourly conflicts; the solution to such conflicts, we hear, should be also 'decongested' and 'decentralized', reallocated down in the global hierarchy, human rights or no human rights, and passed over 'where it belongs', to the local warlords and the weapons they command thanks to the generosity or 'well understood economic interest' of global companies and of governments intent on promoting globalization. For instance, Edward N. Luttwak, Senior Fellow at the American Center for Strategic and International Studies and for many years a reliable barometer of changing Pentagon moods, has appealed in the July–August 1999 issue of *Foreign*



*Affairs* (described by the *Guardian* as 'the most influential periodical in print') to 'give war a chance'. Wars, according to Luttwak, are not altogether bad, since they lead to peace. Peace, though, will come only 'when all belligerents become exhausted or when one wins decisively'. The worst thing (and NATO did just such a thing) is to stop them midway, before the shoot-out ends in mutual exhaustion or the incapacitation of one of the warring parties. In such cases conflicts are not resolved, but merely temporarily frozen, and the adversaries use the time of truce to rearm, redeploy and rethink their tactics. So, for your own and their sake, do not interfere 'in other people's wars'.

Luttwak's appeal may well fall on many willing and grateful ears. After all, as the 'promotion of globalization by other means' goes, abstaining from intervention and allowing the war of attrition to reach its 'natural end' would have brought the same benefits without the nuisance of direct engagement in 'other people's wars', and particularly in their awkward and unwieldy consequences. To placate the conscience aroused by the imprudent decision to wage war under a humanitarian banner, Luttwak points out the obvious inadequacy of military involvement as a means to an end: 'Even a large-scale disinterested intervention can fail to achieve its ostensibly humanitarian aim. One wonders whether the Kosovars would have been better off had NATO simply done nothing.' It would probably have been better for the NATO forces to go on with their daily drills and leave the locals to do what the locals had to do.

What caused the second thoughts and prompted the victors to regret the interference (officially proclaimed a success) was their failure to escape the selfsame eventuality which the hit-and-run campaign was meant to ward off: the need for invasion and for the occupation and administration of conquered territory. By the paratroopers' landing and settling in Kosovo the belligerents had been prevented from shooting themselves to death, but the task of keeping them at a safe distance from the shooting range brought the NATO forces 'from heaven to earth' and embroiled them with responsibility for the messy realities on the ground. Henry Kissinger, a sober and perceptive analyst and the grandmaster of politics understood (in a somewhat old-fashioned way) as the art of the possible, warned against another blunder of shouldering the responsibility for the recovery of the lands devastated by the

bombers' war.[15] That plan, Kissinger points out, 'risks turning into an open-ended commitment toward ever deeper involvement, casting us in the role of gendarme of a region of passionate hatreds and where we have few strategic interests'. And 'involvement' is precisely what the wars aimed to 'promote globalization by other means' are meant to avoid! Civil administration, Kissinger adds, would inevitably entail conflicts, and it will fall on the administrators, as their costly and ethically dubious task, to resolve them by force.

Thus far, there are few, if any, signs that the occupying forces may acquit themselves in the conflict-resolution task any better than those whom they bombed out and replaced on account of their failure. In a sharp opposition to the fate of the refugees in whose name the bombing campaign was launched, the daily lives of returnees seldom get into the headlines, but the news which does occasionally reach the readers and listeners of the media is ominous. 'A wave of violence and continued reprisals against Serbs and the Roma minority in Kosovo threatens to undermine the province's precarious stability and leave it ethnically cleansed of Serbs only a month after NATO's troops took control'; reports Chris Bird from Pristina.[16] NATO forces on the ground seem lost and helpless in the face of raging ethnic hatreds, which looked so easy to ascribe to the malice aforethought of but one villain, and so to resolve, when watched from the TV cameras installed on ultrasonic bombers.

Jean Clair, alongside many other observers, expects the immediate outcome of the Balkan war to be a profound and durable destabilization of the whole area, and the implosion rather than maturation of young and vulnerable, or still unborn, democracies of the Macedonian, Albanian, Croatian or Bulgarian type.[17] (Daniel Vernet supplied his survey of the views expressed on that subject by high-class Balkan political and social scientists with the title 'The Balkans face a risk of agony without end'.[18]) But he also wonders how the political void opened by cutting the roots of the nation-states' viability will be filled. Global market forces, jubilant at the prospect of no longer being stemmed and obstructed, would probably step in, but they would not wish (or manage, if they wished) to deputize for the absent or disempowered political authorities. Nor would they necessarily be interested in the resurrection of a strong and confident nation-state in full command of its territory.



'Another Marshal plan' is the most commonly suggested answer to the present quandary. It is not just the generals who are notorious for constantly fighting the last victorious war. But one cannot pay one's way out of every predicament, however large the sums laid aside for the purpose. The Balkan predicament is starkly different from that of the rebuilding by nation-states after War World II of their sovereignty together with the livelihood of their citizens. What we are facing in the Balkans after the Kosovo war is not only the task of material reconstruction almost from scratch (the Jugoslavs' livelihood has been all but destroyed) but also the seething and festering interethnic chauvinisms which have emerged from the war reinforced. The inclusion of the Balkans in the network of global markets would not do much to assuage intolerance and hatred, since it will add to, rather than detract from that insecurity which was (and remains) the prime source of boiling tribal sentiments. There is, for instance, a real danger that the weakening of Serbian power to resist will serve as a standing invitation to its neighbours to engage in a new round of hostilities and ethnic cleansings.

Given the NATO politicians' unprepossessing and off-putting record of clumsy handling of the delicate and complex issues typical of the Balkan 'belt of mixed populations' (as Hannah Arendt perceptively called it), one can fear a further series of costly blunders. One would not be wide of the mark either when suspecting the imminence of a moment at which European leaders, having made sure that no new wave of refugees and asylum-seekers is threatening their affluent electorate, will lose their interest in the unmanageable lands as they already have so many times before – in Somali, Sudan, Rwanda, East Timor and Afghanistan. We may then be back at square one, after a detour strewn with corpses. Antonina Jelyazkova, the director of the International Institute for Minority Studies, expressed this well (as quoted by Vernet): 'One cannot solve the question of minorities with bombs. The blows let loose the devil on both sides.'[19] Taking the side of nationalistic vindications, NATO actions beefed up further the already frenzied nationalisms of the area and prepared the ground for the future repetitions of genocidal attempts. One of the most gruesome consequences is that the mutual accommodation and friendly coexistence of languages, cultures and religions of the area have been made less likely than ever before. Whatever the intentions, the outcomes go against the grain of what a truly ethical undertaking would have us expect.

The conclusion, preliminary as it is, is inauspicious. The attempts to mitigate the tribal aggression through the new 'global police actions' have thus far proved inconclusive at best, and more likely counterproductive. The overall effects of the relentless globalization have been sharply unbalanced: the injury of renewed tribal strife has come first, while the medicine needed to heal it is, at best, at the test (more likely the trial-and-error) stage. Globalization appears to be much more successful in adding new vigour to intercommunal enmity and strife than in promoting the peaceful coexistence of communities.

## Filling the void

For the multinationals (that is, global companies with scattered and shifting local interests and allegiancies), 'the ideal world' 'is one of no states, or at least of small rather than larger states', Eric Hobsbawm observed. 'Unless it has oil, the smaller the state, the weaker it is, and the less money it takes to buy a government.'

> What we have today is in effect a dual system, the official one of the 'national economies' of states, and the real but largely unofficial one of transnational units and institutions . . . [U]nlike the state with its territory and power, other elements of the 'nation' can be and easily are overriden by the globalization of the economy. Ethnicity and language are the two obvious ones. Take away state power and coercive force, and their relative insignificance is clear.[20]

As the globalization of the economy proceeds by leaps and bounds, 'buying governments', to be sure, is ever less necessary. The glaring inability of governments to balance the books with the resources they control (that is, the resources which they can be sure would stay inside the realm of their jurisdiction whatever way of balancing the books they chose) would suffice to make the government not just surrender to the inevitable, but actively and keenly to collaborate with the 'globals'.

Anthony Giddens used the metaphor of the apocryphal 'juggernaut' to grasp the mechanism of world-wide 'modernization'. The same metaphor fits well the present-day globalization of the economy: it is increasingly difficult to separate the actors and their [illegible] as most national governments vie with each other



to implore, cajole or seduce the global juggernaut to change track and roll first to the lands they administer. The few among them who are too slow, dim-witted, myopic or just vainglorious to join in the competition will either find themselves in dire trouble having nothing to boast about when it comes to wooing their 'voting with the wallets' electors, or be promptly condemned and ostracized by the compliant chorus of 'world opinion' and then showered with bombs or with threats of showering with bombs in order to restore their good sense and prompt them to join or rejoin the ranks.

If the principle of nation-states' sovereignty is finally discredited and removed from the statute-books of international law, if the states' power of resistance is effectively broken so that it needs no longer to be seriously reckoned with in the global powers' calculations, the replacement of the 'world of nations' by the supranational order (a global political system of checks-and-balances to constrain and regulate the global economic forces) is but one – and from today's perspective not the most certain – of the possible scenarios. The world-wide spread of what Pierre Bourdieu has dubbed 'the policy of precarization' is equally, if not more, likely to ensue. If the blow delivered to state sovereignty proves fatal and terminal, if the state loses its monopoly of coercion (which Max Weber and Norbert Elias alike considered to be its most distinctive feature and, simultaneously, the *sine qua non* attribute of modern rationality or civilized order), it does not necessarily follow that the sum total of violence, including violence with potentially genocidal consequences, will diminish; violence may be only 'deregulated', descending from the state to the 'community' (neo-tribal) level.

In the absence of the institutional frame of 'arboretic' structures (to use Deleuze/Guattari's metaphor), sociality may well return to its 'explosive' manifestations, spreading rhizomically and sprouting formations of varying degree of durability, but invariably unstable, hotly contested and devoid of foundation to rely on – except the passionate, frenetic actions of their adherents. The endemic instability of the foundations would need to be compensated for. An active (whether willing or enforced) complicity in the crimes which only the continuous existence of an 'explosive community' may exonerate and effectively exempt from punishment is the most suitable candidate to fill the vacancy. Explosive communities need

violence to be born and need violence to go on living. They need enemies who threaten their extinction and enemies to be collectively persecuted, tortured and mutilated, in order to make every member of the community into an accessory to what, in case the battle were lost, would most certainly be declared a crime against humanity, prosecuted and punished.

In a long series of challenging studies (*Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*; *Le Bouc émissaire*; *La Violence et le sacré*) René Girard developed a comprehensive theory of the role of violence in the birth and perseverance of community. A violent urge is always seething just under the calm surface of peaceful and friendly co-operation; it needs to be channelled beyond the boundaries of community to cut off the communal island of tranquillity, where violence is prohibited. Violence, which would otherwise call the bluff of communal unity, is thereby recycled into the weapon of communal defence. In this recycled form it is indispensable; it needs to be restaged ever again in the form of a sacrificial rite, for which a surrogate victim is selected according to rules that are hardly ever explicit, yet nevertheless strict. 'There is a common denominator that determines the efficacy of all sacrifices.' This common denominator is

> internal violence – all the dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels within the community that the sacrifices are designed to suppress. The purpose of the sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric.

What unites the numerous forms of ritualistic sacrifice is its purpose of keeping alive the memory of the communal unity and its precariousness. But to perform this role the 'surrogate victim', the object sacrificed at the altar of communal unity, must be properly selected – and the rules of selection are as demanding as they are precise. To be suitable for the sacrifice, the potential object 'must bear a sharp resemblance to the human categories excluded from the ranks of the "sacrificeable" ' (that is, the humans assumed to be the 'insiders of the community') 'while still maintaining a degree of difference that forbids all possible confusion'. The candidates must be outside, but not too far; similar to 'us rightful community members' yet unmistakably different. The act of sacrificing these objects is meant, after all, to draw ght unsurpassable



goes without saying that the categories from which victims are regularly selected are

> beings who are outside or on the fringes of society; prisoners of war, slaves, pharmakos . . . exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants. Their status as foreigners or enemies, their servile condition, or simply their age prevents these future victims from fully integrating themselves into the community.

The absence of social link with the 'legitimate' members of the community (or prohibition to establish such link) has an added advantage: victims 'can be exposed to violence without risk of vengeance';[21] one can punish them with impunity – or so one may hope, while voicing quite opposite expectations, painting the murderous capacity of the victims in the most lurid of colours and issuing reminders that the ranks must be kept closed and that the vigour and vigilance of community must be maintained at the highest pitch.

Girard's theory goes a long way towards making sense of the violence that is profuse and rampant at the frayed frontiers of communities, particularly communities whose identities are uncertain and contested, or, more to the point, of the common use of violence as the boundary-drawing device when the boundaries are absent, porous or blurred. Three comments seem in order, however.

First: if regular sacrifice of 'surrogate victims' is a ceremony of renewal of the unwritten 'social contract', it can play this role thanks to its other aspect – that of the collective remembrance of an historical or mythical 'event of creation', of the original compact entered on the battlefield soaked with enemy blood. If there was no such event, it needs to be retrospectively construed by the assiduous repetitiveness of the sacrifice rite. Genuine or invented, however, it sets a pattern for all the candidates for community status – the would-be communities not yet in position to replace the gory 'real thing' with benign ritual and the murder of real victims with the killing of surrogate ones. However sublimated may be the form of the ritualized sacrifice which transforms communal life into a continuous replay of the miracle of 'independence day', the pra atic lessons drawn by all aspiring communities prompt deeds short on subtlety and liturgical elegance.

Second: the idea of a community committing the 'original murder' in order to render its existence safe and secure and tighten up the ranks is in Girard's own terms incongruent; before the original murder had been committed there would hardly have been the ranks to be tightened and a communal existence to be made secure. (Girard himself implies that much, when explaining in his chapter 10 the ubiquitous symbolics of severance in the sacrificial liturgy: 'The birth of the community is first and foremost an act of separation.') The vision of calculated deportation of inner violence beyond the community borders (community killing outsiders in order to keep peace among the insiders) is another case of the tempting but ill-founded expedient of taking a function (whether genuine or imputed) for the causal explanation. It is, rather, the original murder itself that brings community to life, by setting the demand for solidarity and the need to close the ranks. It is the legitimacy of the original victims which calls for communal solidarity and which tends to be reconfirmed year by year in the sacrificial rites.

Third: Girard's assertion that 'sacrifice is primarily an act of violence without risk of vengeance' (p. 13) needs to be complemented by the observation that to make the sacrifice effective the absence of risk must be carefully hidden or better still emphatically denied. From the original murder the enemy must have emerged not quite dead, but undead, a zombie ready to rise from the grave at any moment. A really dead enemy, or dead enemy incapable of resurrection, is unlikely to inspire enough fear to justify the need of unity – and sacrificial rites are conducted regularly in order to remind everybody around that the rumours of the enemy's ultimate demise are themselves the enemy propaganda and so the oblique, yet vivid proof that the enemy is alive, kicking and biting.

In a formidable series of studies of the Bosnian genocide, Arne Johan Vetlesen points out that in the absence of reliable (we would hope durable and secure) institutional foundations – an uninvolved, lukewarm or indifferent bystander becomes the community's most formidable and hated enemy: 'From the viewpoint of an agent of genocide, bystanders are people possessing a potential . . . to halt the on-going genocide.'[22] Let me add that whether the bystanders will or will not act on that potential, their presence as 'bystanders' (people doing nothing to destroy the joint enemy) is a challenge to the sole proposition from which the evolving community claims



its *raison d'être*: that it is an 'either us or them' situation, that the destruction of 'them' is indispensable for 'our' survival and killing 'them' is the *conditio sine qua non* of 'us' staying alive. Let me add as well that since the membership of the community is in no way 'preordained' or institutionally assured, the 'baptism by (spilt) blood' – a personal participation in collective crime – is the sole way of joining and the sole legitimation of continuous membership. Unlike state-administered genocide (and, most prominently, unlike the Holocaust), the kind of genocide which is the birth-ritual of explosive communities cannot be entrusted to the experts or delegated to specialized offices and units. It matters less how many 'enemies' are killed; it matters more how numerous are the killers.

It also matters that the murder is committed openly, in the daylight and in full vision, that there are witnesses to the crime who know the perpetrators by name – so that retreat and hiding from retribution ceases to be a viable option and the community born of the initiatory crime remains the only refuge for the perpetrators. Ethnic cleansing, as Arne Johan Vetlesen found in his study of Bosnia,

> seizes upon and *maintains* the existing conditions of proximity between perpetrator and victim and in fact creates such conditions if they are not present and prolongs them as a matter of principle when they seem to wane. In this super-personalized violence, whole families were forced to be witnesses to torture, rape and killings . . .[23]

Again unlike in the case of the old-style genocide, and above all the Holocaust as their 'ideal type', witnesses are indispensable ingredients in the mixture of factors of which an explosive community is born. An explosive community can reasonably (though often deceptively) count on a long life only in so far as the original crime remains unforgotten and so its members, aware that the proofs of their crime are aplenty, stay together and solidary – cemented as they are by the joint vested interest in closing ranks in order to contest the criminal and punishable nature of their crime. The best way to meet these conditions is periodically, or continuously, to revive the memory of the crime and the fear of punishment through adding new crimes to the old. Since explosive communities are normally born in pairs (there would be no 'us' if [illegible] 'them') and since genocidal violence is a crime eagerly

resorted to by whichever of the two members of the pair happens to be momentarily stronger, there would be normally no shortage of opportunity to find a suitable pretext for a new 'ethnic cleansing' or genocidal attempt. Violence which accompanies explosive sociality and is the way of life of the communities it sediments is therefore inherently self-propagating, self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing. It generates Gregory Bateson's 'schizmogenetic chains', which staunchly resist all efforts to cut them short, let alone to reverse them.

A feature which renders explosive communities of the kind analysed by Girard and Vetlesen particularly fierce, riotous and gory, endowing them with considerable genocidal potential, is their 'territorial connection'. That potential can be traced to another paradox of the era of liquid modernity. Territoriality is intimately linked to the spatial obsessions of solid modernity; it feeds on them and in its turn contributes to their preservation or restitution. Explosive communities, on the contrary, are at home in the era of liquefied modernity. The blend of explosive sociality with territorial aspirations is bound to result therefore in many a monstrous, abortive and 'unfit' mutation. The alternation of 'fagic' and 'emic' strategies in the conquest and defence of space (which as a rule was the prime stake in the conflicts of solid modernity) appears starkly out of place (yet more importantly, 'out of time') in a world dominated by the light/fluid/software variety of modernity; in such a world, it breaks the norm instead of following the rule.

The besieged sedentary populations refuse to accept the rules and stakes of the new 'nomadic' power game, an attitude which the up-and-coming global nomadic elite finds exceedingly difficult (as well as utterly repulsive and undesirable) to comprehend and cannot but perceive as the sign of retardation and backwardness. When it comes to confrontation, and particularly military confrontation, the nomadic elites of the liquid modern world view the territorially oriented strategy of sedentary populations as 'barbaric' by comparison with their own 'civilized' military strategy. It is now the nomadic elite which sets the tune and dictates the criteria by which territorial obsessions are classified and judged. The table has been turned – and the old tested weapon of 'chronopolitics', once used by triumphant settled populations to expel the nomads to barbaric/savage prehistory, is now deployed by the victorious nomadic elites in their struggle with whatever has remained of the territorial sovereignty and against those still dedicated to its defence.



In their reprobation of territorial practices nomadic elites can count on popular support. The outrage widely felt at the sight of massive expulsions named 'ethnic cleansing' gathers an added vigour from the fact that they look uncannily like a magnified version of tendencies which are manifested daily, though on a smaller scale, close to home – all over the urban spaces of the lands conducting the civilizing crusade. Fighting the 'ethnic cleansers', we exorcize our own 'inner demons', which prompt us to ghettoize the unwanted 'foreigners', to applaud the tightening of the asylum laws, to demand the removal of obnoxious strangers from the city streets and to pay any price for the shelters surrounded by surveillance cameras and armed guards. In the Jugoslav war the stakes on both sides were remarkably similar, though what was on one side a declared objective was an eagerly, though clumsily, held secret on the other. The Serbs wished to evict from their territory a recalcitrant and awkward Albanian minority, while the NATO countries, so to speak, 'responded in kind': their military campaign was triggered primarily by the wish of other Europeans to keep Albanians in Serbia and so nip in the bud the threat of their reincarnation as awkward and unwanted migrants.

## Cloakroom communities

The link between the explosive community in its specifically liquid modern incarnation and territoriality is, however, by no means necessary and certainly not universal. Most contemporary explosive communities are made to the measure of liquid modern times even if their spread can be territorially plotted; they are, if anything, exterritorial (and tend to be all the more spectacularly successful the freer they are from territorial constraints) – just like the identities they conjure up and keep precariously alive in the brief interval between explosion and extinction. Their 'explosive' nature chimes well with the identities of the liquid modern era: similarly to such identities, the communities in question tend to be volatile, transient and 'single-aspect' or 'single-purpose'. Their life-span is short while full of sound and fury. They derive power not from their expected duration, but, paradoxically, from their precarious-

ness and uncertain future, from the vigilance and emotional investment which their brittle existence vociferously demands.

The name 'cloakroom community' grasps well some of their characteristic traits. Visitors to a spectacle dress *for the occasion*, abiding by a sartorial code distinct from those codes they follow daily – the act which simultaneously sets apart the visit as 'a special occasion' and makes the visitors look, for the duration of the event, much more uniform than they do in the life outside the theatre building. It is the evening performance which brought them all here – different as their interests and pastimes during the day could have been. Before entering the auditorium they all leave the coats or anoraks they wore in the streets in the playhouse cloakroom (by counting the number of hooks and hangers used, one can judge how full is the house and how assured is the immediate future of the production). During the performance all eyes are on the stage; so is everybody's attention. Mirth and sadness, laughter and silence, rounds of applause, shouts of approval and gasps of surprise are synchronized – as if carefully scripted and directed. After the last fall of the curtain, however, the spectators collect their belongings from the cloakroom and when putting their street clothes on once more return to their ordinary mundane and different roles, a few moments later again dissolving in the variegated crowd filling the city streets from which they emerged a few hours earlier.

Cloakroom communities need a spectacle which appeals to similar interests dormant in otherwise disparate individuals and so bring them all together for a stretch of time when other interests – those which divide them instead of uniting – are temporarily laid aside, put on a slow burner or silenced altogether. Spectacles as the occasion for the brief existence of a cloakroom community do not fuse and blend individual concerns into 'group interest'; by being added up, the concerns in question do not acquire a new quality, and the illusion of sharing which the spectacle may generate would not last much longer than the excitement of the performance.

Spectacles have come to replace the 'common cause' of the heavy/solid/hardware modernity era – which makes a lot of difference to the nature of new-style identities and goes a long way towards making sense of the emotional tensions and aggression-generating traumas which from time to time accompany their pursuit.

'Carnival communities' seems to be another fitting name for the communities under discussion. Such communities, after all, offer



temporary respite from the agonies of daily solitary struggles, from the tiresome condition of individuals *de jure* persuaded or forced to pull themselves out of their troublesome problems by their own bootstraps. Explosive communities are *events* breaking the monotony of daily solitude, and like all carnival events they let off the pent-up steam and allow the revellers better to endure the routine to which they must return the moment the frolicking is over. And like philosophy in Ludwig Wittgenstein's melancholy musings, they 'leave everything as it was' (that is, if one does not count the wounded victims and the moral scars of those who escaped the lot of 'collateral casualties').

'Cloakroom' or 'carnival', the explosive communities are as indispensable a feature of the liquid modernity landscape as the essentially solitary plight of the individuals *de jure* and their ardent, yet on the whole vain efforts to rise to the level of individuals *de facto*. The spectacles, the pegs and hangers in the cloakroom and the crowd-pulling carnival fairs are many and varied, catering for any sort of taste. The Huxleyan brave new world has borrowed from the Orwellian 1984 the stratagem of 'five minutes of (collectivized) hatred', shrewdly and ingeniously complementing it by the expedient of the 'five minutes of (collectivized) adoration'. Each day the first-page press and first-minute TV headlines wave a new banner under which to gather and march (virtual) shoulder to (virtual) shoulder. They offer a virtual 'common purpose' around which virtual communities may entwine, pushed and pulled alternately by the synchronized feeling of panic (sometimes of a moral, but more often than not of immoral or amoral kind) and ecstasy.

One effect of cloakroom/carnival communities is that they effectively ward off the condensation of 'genuine' (that is, comprehensive and lasting) communities which they mime and (misleadingly) promise to replicate or generate from scratch. They scatter instead of condense the untapped energy of sociality impulses and so contribute to the perpetuation of the solitude desperately yet vainly seeking redress in the rare and far-between concerted and harmonious collective undertakings.

Far from being a cure for the sufferings born of the unbridged and seemingly unbridgeable gap between the fate of the individual *de jure* and the destiny of the individual *de facto*, they are the symptoms and sometimes causal factors of the social disorder specific to the liquid modernity condition.