

Space in the Globalising World

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A bizarre adventure happened to space on the road to globalisation: it lost its importance while gaining in significance. On the one hand, as Paul Virilio insists,¹ territorial sovereignty has lost almost all substance and a good deal of its former attraction; if every spot can be reached and abandoned instantaneously, a permanent hold over a territory with the usual accompaniment of long-term duties and commitments turns from an asset into a liability and becomes a burden rather than a resource in power struggle. On the other hand, as Richard Sennett points out, 'as the shifting institutions of the economy diminish the experience of belonging somewhere special ... people's commitments increase to geographic places like nations, cities and localities'.² On the one hand, everything can be done to far away places of other peoples without going anywhere. On the other, little can be prevented from being done to one's own place however stubbornly one holds to it.

This curious, confused and confusing condition tends to generate equally ambivalent politics – and both are reflected in the notorious perplexities of the 'globalisation' debate. By its nature, all theory postulates a consistent and coherent reality, and so the glaring incoherence in the perception and treatment of space makes theorising a truly daunting task.

To reduce the confusion somewhat, the conspicuously 'uneven' or one-sided nature of the globalising tendency needs to be admitted. The starting point of all sensible attempts to comprehend the condition brought about by that tendency must be the heeding of Jonathan Friedman's³ word of caution: globalisation 'does not mean unification or even integration in any other way than increased coordination of world markets'. Globalisation does not mean the emergence of a global civil (or any other for that matter) society, complete with the institutions of political representation and a shared code of laws and ethical rules; even less does it mean the appearance of a 'global community' (coordination of world markets of money and commodities triggers, if anything, barrier-building, boundary-drawing, separation and exclusion); and most certainly it does not mean a 'global culture'.

The idea of the latter, the almost total consensus of intellectual 'hybridity debates' notwithstanding, is hardly a reflection on extant or emerging realities of the great majority of the world population; the much talked about 'global culture' is, rather, a gloss on the new exterritoriality and 'disembeddenment' of global élites, who draw freely from the global pool of styles and the do-it-yourself, 'now put on, now take off' identities yet resent the attachment (and even more the commitment) to any one of them in particular. 'The frightening economic cosmopolitanism', says Richard Rorty,⁴ 'has, as a by-product, an agreeable cultural cosmopolitanism'. That latter cosmopolitanism (theorised self-indulgently yet misleadingly by many members of the élite as 'hybridisation') is confined, in Rorty's estimation, to no more than the richest 25 per cent of Americans; in all probability, that percentage is smaller in countries with less 'global clout' and quite negligible in those on the receiving end of global economics.

Such minority status only adds vigour to the proclamations of the emergent 'globality of culture' – as one would expect in the case of a cultural model whose main function is to secure the self-distatiation of the élite. One would not expect the 'global' (or, more correctly, non-local) culture of the global élite to have any of the cultural anthropologists' 'trickle down' effect that allegedly leads slowly yet unremittingly to the establishment of a universally shared culture. In Rorty's vivid expression, having travelled to new breath-taking, vast global expanses, the cosmopolitan élite 'pulled up the drawbridge behind them'. As Robert Reich put it in his *Work of Nations*, what has happened is the 'secession of the successful' – and that secession, the cutting off of local ties and the lofty dismissal of the degrading preoccupations of the *hoi polloi* with the 'local issue' of survival, is itself a solid guarantee that those left behind won't follow the newly emancipated into the realm of global freedom.

Times of Disengagement

The blatant discrepancy of scale between increasingly global financial and trade powers on the one hand, and politics and cultures which stay local as before on the other, does not seem to be a transient, short-lived condition which can be explained away as 'cultural lag' or a temporary structural dislocation which will soon be rectified thanks to the self-equilibrating capacity of the emergent global system. Quite the contrary; it looks like a permanent, constitutive

and indispensable feature of the 'global order'; one is tempted to resort to Talcott Parsons' terminology and call it a 'structural prerequisite' of the global system.

Following Norbert Elias, we could say that the 'configuration', that is the network of dependencies, has already achieved a truly global (or, in Alberto Melucci's terms, 'planetary') scale. However locally confined their origins and however local their ostensible purposes, actions tend to influence the global balance of powers and resources and modify conditions in distant and apparently secluded parts of the planet. On the other hand, hardly any action can be undertaken locally without reckoning with the pressures or resistance of remote forces beyond the control of the local agents and beyond their capacity for prediction. The network of dependencies is truly planetary in scale, but it is not matched by a similarly global, enforceable code of law nor a global network of political and juridical institutions. It is precisely this mis-match that allows global finances and trade a remarkable freedom of movement which they have no intention of forsaking. 'Equilibration' of the present-day worldwide economic system requires the perpetuation, not the rectification, of the discrepancy between the scale of economic dependencies, political control and cultural comprehension: a permanent separation of 'real power' from politics, and subordination of local decisional (that is, political) agencies to the rules of the global power game – rules which they have neither the power to legislate and enforce nor the ability to negotiate and more than marginally correct. To quote Rorty once more, 'an attempt by any country to prevent the immiseration of its workers may result only in depriving them of employment'. The global freedom of financial and trade powers requires that the reach of political decision makers is short – and also, for better safety, that their hands are tied.

At all times, space tends to have as much significance as has been invested into it by the ends and the means of human actions; and so in the power game of globalisation, space has been stripped of significance. Following a sharp u-turn in the strategy of domination, the territorial conquest and annexation with the attendant awkward and cumbersome duties of day-to-day management, pattern-maintenance and policing came to be viewed as a liability which needs to be avoided at all cost. Imperialism and colonialism have lost their past allure. Speed, acceleration, escape, avoidance and cutting costs and losses have replaced normative regulation, surveillance and discipline drill as the principal instruments of domination. In short: in the glob-

alising world, disengagement has replaced engagement as the paramount technique of power.

Power is a social relation. It is 'enabling' on one side of the relationship, but only because it is disabling on the other; in a nutshell, those with untied hands dominate those who have their hands tied. The scope of empowerment and the degree of disempowerment are both measured by the range of realistic options, wide in the first case and limited in the second. The greater is the freedom of manoeuvre on one side of the relationship, the more constrained in their choices are those on the other, subordinate side of the relationship. With their freedom of choice limited or better still abolished altogether, the conduct of the dominated becomes predictable and so no longer needs to be viewed with apprehension as an 'unknown variable' in the dominant side's calculations.

For the greater part of modern history the effect of 'disablement' was pursued through the various applications of the Bentham/Foucault panoptical model of control-by-surveillance. The constitutive principle of panoptical arrangement was the asymmetry of visibility: the space occupied by the inmates of Panopticon was open to view, while the opacity of the space occupied by their supervisors forced the inmates to behave around the clock as if they were under continuous observation and could expect any deviation from the prescribed behaviour to be swiftly spotted and punished. The inmates at the receiving end of panoptical surveillance were thus confined to routine, monotonously repetitive conduct, and so their responses, being fully calculable, could be safely left out of account in the managers' plans. What kept the surveilled on track and away from mischief was the real or putative, but always assumed presence of the supervisors; routine was maintained by the threat of sanctions of a kind which could be administered only 'on the spot', by the managers and their hired agents.

In other words, in the panoptical arrangement both sides – the surveillers and the surveilled, the managers and the managed – are equally 'tied to the place'. Both sides had to be 'local' and stay such – the power relation would not survive their separation. Domination meant reciprocity of dependency and required *mutuality* of engagement. Divorce being out of the question and both sides being doomed to each others' company, frictions and skirmishes were inevitable, each side trying to gain more freedom for itself and to confine the liberty of the opposite number. But negotiations of *modus vivendi*, seeking solutions to conflicts and compromises that would hopefully ward

off or at least limit the likelihood of future conflicts, were also imperative. The era of mutual engagement was the time of perpetual conflict but also an era of mutual accommodation. The powerful were, after all, as dependent on those whom they tried to strip of power as the powerless were on their superiors. Secession of the plebeians against which Mennenius Agrippa had to preach in Ancient Rome was unthinkable; but so was the secession of the patricians.

This is no longer true; or at any rate it loses its credibility by the day. Not only do patricians find ways to secede whenever the space they inhabit proves too hot for comfort or too costly to keep in order, but in addition they have found in the stratagem of secession (and above all in their amply demonstrated *freedom* to secede, at short notice or without warning) an instrument of domination many times more convenient, much cheaper and far less troublesome than the faithful (but unwieldy) capital-, time- and effort-intensive Panopticon. Patricians of the globalisation era are, as before, the principal source of risk and uncertainty in the plebeians' condition; but similar conditions do not apply in reverse – dependency is no longer *mutual*. And so there is no more need (let alone the 'must') of a long-term, lasting, 'till death do us part' mutual engagement. Patricians can rely on the plebeians' meekness, placidity and submission without immersing themselves in the minutiae of day-to-day management and supervision, or hiring people to do this on their behalf. The threat of packing up and going elsewhere (of, to use the fashionable euphemisms, 'downsizing', 'outsourcing', 'streamlining' or 'rationalising') will achieve the same effect at much less cost, and much more radically.

The managers of today are, for all practical purposes, *exterritorial*. Their power lies in their wondrous capacity to make themselves inaccessible – to escape where the 'nuisance-making power' of people whom they dominate and off whose labour they live no longer matters. Firm grip over territory has been replaced by the facility of leaving the territory behind. The managers no longer draw their strength from their bulky possessions, but rather from their ability to travel light. In a short story, 'Crocodile Tears', A.S. Byatt describes one of them – a woman who decided to fly away from a sudden crisis she would rather not face:

She was an efficient woman, and she packed for a business trip – a night-dress, cheque-books, the usual pharmacopeia, uncrushable trousers and tunics, slippers, washing things, make-up, laptop, mobile phone, Universal adaptor, Passport ...

The idea that it was possible to vanish, that there was nothing ineluctably necessary about her work, or her home, was a condition of her pleasure in those things ...

She felt a light-headed pleasure in the fact that she did not know where she was going. It could be nowhere at all, anywhere at all ...

The world was small now, which was good; you could move in it with ease ...

The major worry of contemporary managers is not the management of people, but securing their own perpetual volatility, adaptability and facility to move quickly where opportunity beckons. They are Italo Calvino's 'tree-jumping barons', with whom the peasant plodders down there, on the ground, would never catch up. Their own freedom to go on jumping trees is the only 'normative regulation' which they demand from the world and which, once acquired, they would staunchly defend. The rest of the order-guarding worries they would gladly leave to the self-management of the 'plodders', the locals doomed to stay local – in the comfortable knowledge of the ultimate vanity of all 'local self-management' efforts to constrain their own moves, and of the locals' awareness that the attempts to arrest or slow down their movements are doomed to misfire and so could be undertaken only at the locals' peril. The locals have lost much of their bargaining power; or, rather, whatever power they may have is of little use unless *both* sides are under pressure to forge an agreement, and pressure is but one-sided if one of the sides is free to abandon the negotiating table at will. And so the negotiating sides are not bound to stay together 'for richer and poorer, in health and illness'. The constant and all-too-real threat of breaking out if conditions 'are not right' casts the 'locals' into a state of endemic precariousness, and for this reason alone puts paid to the prospect of compromise. Surrender is the only option the sober and rational locals may take.

The Anti-territorial Wars

No need, therefore, for panopticon; and no point in wishing to invest in its construction and servicing. For the global élite the conquest of new lands has lost the lustre it used to have in the times when 'powerful' meant big and solid. The era of empires and imperialism, of the chase to fill up the remaining blank spots on the planetary map, of wars aimed at the re-distribution of territorial sovereignties, is, by

and large, over. In pursuing the ideal of free trade and the abolition of any spatial limits which might stand in its way, as far as the global élite is concerned direct involvement in the administration of a territory and the assumption of a direct responsibility for keeping it in order would be blatantly counter-productive. That awkward task is better left to the 'locals'; being burdened with that task would make the locals no match for the free-floating, extraterritorial globals. The superiority of global élites consists in their exquisite lightness, the absence of any exclusive (durable and solid) attachments to any particular space, freedom from the bonds imposed by possessions that cannot be moved and virtual absence of chattels to be carried in case of moving home.

Little wonder, therefore, that for the global élites the 'ground war' is an anathema; it would impose the kind of responsibility which global élites would more than anything else wish to avoid and which avoid they must – lest they will forfeit their advantage over the 'locals'. The wars promoting the globalising cause are meant to 'bomb the reluctant into submission', not to expand the dominion over a territory. If new land conquests were the most coveted spoils of the age of empires, then territory-phobia is the most conspicuous feature of the 'globalising' wars; in their effects and in their conduct alike they are meant to hammer home the message of the new *unimportance* of space. The armed expeditions meant to police local order are undertaken only as a last resort, and even then reluctantly; they are better 'decommissioned' further down in the global hierarchy and ceded to the immediate neighbours for whom, much to their dismay, space still counts and the proximity to dangerous spots is a constant source of danger (as in the case of the Australia-led expedition to East Timor prompted by the need to stem a new flood of 'boat people', or in the case of the intervention in Kosovo undertaken by a NATO coalition glued together by similar worries about asylum-seekers). As Nik Gowing, the Diplomatic Editor for the British Channel Four News, reports⁵, one of the top officials of the United Nations compared the prospect of sending troops to Bosnia to that of 'diving into an empty swimming pool'. In the end, when ground engagement proved for many reasons unavoidable, the 'fundamental long-term strategy' of 'ministers, diplomats and the military' was 'to engage in low-risk, low-cost, minimalist policies which gave the impression of a full engagement when the political will was anything but that'. 'Palliatives and alibis' were topmost priorities; only 'pseudo-decisions for pseudo-actions' were taken.

On the still distant but no more unattainable horizon loom wars of another style altogether: punitive operations which would exclude all physical contact with the adversary – not just the ground combat hopelessly outdated and out of fashion, but even the quite recent invention of hit-and-run bombing sorties or self-guided smart missiles. American scholars John Arquilla and David Ronfelt coined the names ‘cyberwars’, ‘netwars’ and ‘noopolitics’ to capture the nature of the imminent future wars.⁶ The attackers won’t need to resort to the argument of weapons, nor would they have to dirty their hands while making the enemy’s territory into a killing field; it would be enough to paralyse and incapacitate the enemies, disorganise the enemies’ power to resist (indeed, their capacity for consistent and cohesive action) by disrupting their networks of communication (in the author’s view, today’s equivalent of social structure), by feeding in false information or inundating the network with an unassimilable flood of messages. The measures undertaken under the aegis of the ‘cyberwar’ would be an equivalent of nerve-gas – this time applied to the *societal* body. As Alvin and Heidi Toffler predicted a few years ago,⁷ in the techniques of destruction as much as in the technology of production the imminent shift will lead from the ‘tangible’ to the ‘intangible’.

It needs to be noted, though, that the shift in the decisive factors of war, in the new strategists’ opinion, won’t eliminate the demand for weapons murderous and destructive in the orthodox, literal sense of the term (global arms industries have nothing to worry about); it will only ‘sanitise’ the role played by global commanders, while leaving the less prepossessing aspects of the operation to the locals. The concept of ‘cyberwar’ is complemented by that of the ‘battle swarm’. As Arquilla and Ronfelt explained (in the *Los Angeles Times* of 20 June 1999), once the netwar-operators managed to disintegrate the ‘social tissue’ of the enemy, a vast sprawling of the little units of the Kosovo Liberation Army would suffice to bring the Serbian army to its knees – even if the total force of the ‘swarm’ were ten times smaller than that of its adversary. That division of (mutually complementary) tasks would presumably spare the ‘globalisers’ the unpleasant need to take direct responsibility for the devastation of the enemy territory and the brutalisation of its population.

The anticipated shift in the strategy of global wars has, as far as global capital is concerned (and particularly its American, by far the most powerful, arm), an added advantage of lubricating afresh the wheels of a military industry dangerously under threat of rusting since the abrupt end of the cold war. A totally new range of weapons

must be developed to serve the needs of the 'cyberwars' and 'battle swarms', while the stocks of old weapons may be profitably sold off to the 'locals' populating more remote and less ethically sensitive lands (like Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia or Sudan) and still engaged in the old-fashioned face-to-face combats.

The new generation of arms is introduced under the conscience-placating name of 'non-lethal weapons'; according to the official and widely disseminated description, they are meant to 'incapacitate' while minimising the number of mortal casualties.⁸ Disclosed examples of such weapons currently developed are 'blinding lasers' and 'acoustic pistols' causing rupture of internal organs by the force of 170 decibel blasts. The 'non-lethality' of such and similar weapons is however a moot question and has been contested in the ongoing public debate on the ground of being more rather than less destructive, more cruel and inhuman than the old-fashioned arms. The new weapons do more than damage the body – they attack directly the personality of victims by 'destabilising their mentality'. The doubts of some experts and the public notwithstanding, a green light for the weapons of the 'cyberwar' era has already brought the results most desired and joyfully welcomed by the military establishment. President Clinton added \$110 billion spread over the next six years to the Pentagon budget, making the headquarters of the American military machine (and increasingly the *spiritus movens* of American global policy) into the largest buyer in the market and a most important vehicle of the 'consumer-led economic recovery'. According to William D. Hartung of the U.S. World Policy Institute, the further increase of the American military budget, at present \$260 billion annually, makes little if any political or military sense since it is already twice as big as the military budgets of all imaginable 'enemies of America', including China, Russia, and the pariah states of Iraq, North Korea and Libya.⁹

Globalisation vs. Statehood

As the nineteenth-century Prussian general Karl von Clausewitz famously observed, 'war is nothing but a continuation of politics with the admixture of other means'. The politics currently in question is that of globalisation: of a relentless dismantling (or, if need be, exploding) of old and new barriers to the free flow of power embodied in finances and commodities. By far the most irritating of the bar-

riers which the tide of globalisation must sweep out of the way is that of the sovereign nation-state: a nation-state trying in earnest to balance the books in order to protect its subjects and promote (as much as it can afford) the standards of just distribution and decent provision.

The legacy of the two hundred years of the modern order, nation-states remain to this day the only sources of authoritatively binding laws that are simultaneously, at least in theory if not always in practice, controlled by the people whose life-conditions these laws affect. Until recently, the protection of the sacrosanct and exclusive sovereignty of the nation-state was the main objective of whatever international agencies were brought into being to monitor, guard and actively promote 'world order' – the defunct League of Nations as much as the chronically ailing United Nations. One thing which such agencies and the states' powers standing behind them would not bear lightly, was 'no man's land' – a territory not subordinated to any of the extant states' sovereignty. Like Nature portrayed by the popular science of those times, international order 'suffered no void'. Within its recognised boundaries, the state was in full command of its subjects, their rights and lives, and interest in such fullness was shared by all accepted political units of the globe. Anything more than a 'diplomatic protest' or a round of economic boycott would be considered an unpardonable interference in 'internal affairs' – a step most states would take but with extreme caution, lest it create a precedent for the questioning of their own sovereign entitlements.

Legislative powers remain to this day the sole property of nation-states, but the legislative realm of the state leaves the movements of global powers outside its limits. It is for that reason that 'state sovereignty' has been emptied of much of its content; it is no longer 'total' or 'absolute' – and everything short of the absolute is a standing invitation to contention and trial-and-error testing. What the state can and what it cannot do within its own territory has become a hotly contested issue and commands no consensus – and the globalising powers do everything they can to gain and retain the right to define the contents and the limits of sovereignty from one case to another. True, there are half-hearted attempts to institute globally binding limits of state prerogatives (like, for instance, the inauspicious Uruguay and Seattle conferences, prominent mostly by ending in stalemate and being ignored by each of the participants who could afford it, at the expense of those who could not), but ever more often the 'international forum' and its few and mostly impotent institutions are bypassed or short-circuited. In the new 'frontierland' of the global

space, initiative lies on the street waiting for the strong, the resolute, the arrogant or the reckless to pick it up.

To put it in a nutshell: democratic institutions of self-government which have developed in the two hundred years of modern history stay local, while the power which draws the limits of their ambitions and their capacity to act turns global and circulates far beyond their reach. The 'leap from the classical international law of states to a cosmopolitan law of a global civil society' (which Jürgen Habermas posited as both imperative and imminent while reflecting on the traumatic experience of the NATO war expedition against Yugoslavia¹⁰) has not occurred as yet and looks no nearer than before. Neither is the 'global civil society', the catapult necessary for the adumbrated 'leap', in sight (rather than talking of the 'unfinished character of global civil society', as Habermas does, one should rather admit that the formation of such society has hardly started anywhere except in philosophers' study rooms). Its birth, at any rate, seems to proceed at a much slower pace than the birth of 'global capitalism' – in a reverse order, if compared to the sequence recorded in the birth story of modern nation-states.

'International community' has little reality apart from the occasional military operation undertaken in its name. It lacks political institutions – and most certainly institutions which could credibly claim authority for their decisions and count on consensus or matter-of-fact discipline, rather than on the surrender of the dissidents to superior force. There is no 'international *polis*', and none is in the making. The United Nations, intended originally to function as its nearest substitute, is singularly unfit as a building site of such a *polis* and will remain unsuitable for the task, unless radically re-thought and re-structured. The United Nations was called into being at the height of the 'all sovereignty to the nation-state' era and at a time when 'globality' translated as the sum-total of inter-state relations – but it is precisely the trimming down of the sovereignty of nation-states and the overriding of state-born and state-promoted policies which today's globalisation brings in its wake. As Habermas pointed out in the quoted article, there is no corpus of 'global law' to which the war commanders and their political superiors could refer. In the absence of such a global, enforceable code of law, they can be guided solely by subjective (and so inevitably dubious and contestable) interpretations. To quote Habermas once more:

When they authorise themselves to act militarily, even nineteen indisputably democratic states remain partisan. They are making use of inter-

pretative and decision-making powers to which only independent institutions would be entitled if things were already properly in order today.

Things are not 'properly in order', though. The 'locals' who ignore global pressures may be brought in line only if duly frightened – but the forces who assume their global remit do not always have sufficient resolve to do so, either because they do not consider the site of the trouble to be of 'strategic importance', or because they anticipate a more than 'hit-and-run' operation and the prospect of a long-term embroilment in affairs they would rather have no truck with, or they are themselves frightened of the resistance they may encounter if they see their own threats through to the end.

Let me point out that what gives the actions of the military arms of the 'international community' a semblance of legality (in practice, if not in theory), is precisely the 'decision-making power' of the bidders for legal recognition; in other words, the *law of the stronger* is in operation – just what one would expect to be the case in a sorely under-institutionalised setting. It is because they are powerful and feel powerful, and certainly are stronger than their appointed adversary, that 'authorisation to act militarily' is given, or at least contemplated. No invocation of 'international community' and its ethical standards, and above all no invocation of its right-and-duty to act on those standards would be loud enough to be reckoned with (and if heard it would not be translated into the 'authorisation to act militarily', if it were Russia who performed an 'ethnic cleansing' Milosevic-style; and it has not been heard in the case of the armed suppression of Tibet's claim to sovereignty by superior Chinese forces). As long and in as far as the power ratio stays favourable to the attackers, they may hope to escape the charge of aggression which otherwise would surely be mounted, and dismiss the accusations lightly if they were made; the bluff of 'international community' is unlikely to be called.

Territorial Wars

For the daily experience which most of us share, the particularly poignant and painful consequence of the new global network of dependencies combined with the gradual, yet relentless dismantling of the institutional safety net which used to protect us from the vagaries of the market and the caprices of market-operated fate, is – paradoxically (though psychologically not surprisingly at all) –

increased value of place. As Richard Sennett explains that paradox in the already quoted article, 'the sense of place is based on the need to belong not to "society" in the abstract, but to somewhere in particular; in satisfying that need, people develop commitment and loyalty'. The 'abstractness' of 'society', let me add, is ever more glaring. Not so long ago, 'society' stood for the 'caring-and-sharing' community and – through the welfare provisions seen as the birth-rights of the citizen rather than a hand-out for the invalid and indolent – it had all the vivid and vital substance of the collective insurance against individual misfortune. Having shed since, or having been robbed of many effective instruments of action it wielded in the times of the nation-state's uncontested sovereignty, 'society' has however lost a good deal of its past 'materiality'. What keeps it 'real' is that it still may hurt on occasion, and painfully; but if it comes to the supply of goods necessary for decent life and for fighting back the adversities of fate it looks disconcertingly empty-handed. No wonder that hopes of salvation descending from the control towers of 'society' (if only properly manned) wilt and fade. No wonder also that 'good society' is a notion most of us would not bother thinking about and many would see as a waste of time.

Frustrated love ends in indifference at best, but more often than not in suspicion and resentment. 'Society' does not satisfy the desire for a secure home, not so much because of its 'abstractness' (it is no more 'imagined', let us remember, than 'nation' or 'community') but because of its recent betrayal, still fresh in popular memory. It has not delivered on its promises, and from the most vital among them it has openly retreated. To people who are smarting under the pressures of insecure existence and uncertain prospects, it promises more, not less, insecurity; and in a drastic change of tune still difficult to assimilate calls them to exercise their own wits, rely on their own guts and stamina and to complain about their own lassitude or laziness in cases of defeat.

Among the 'imagined totalities' to which people could belong and in which they could seek (and hopefully find) shelter, a void yawns at the spot once occupied by 'society'. That term once stood for the state, armed with means of enforcement as well as the powerful means of rectifying at least the most outrageous of social injustices. Such a state is receding from view. Hoping that the state would do something tangible to mitigate the insecurity of existence whose prospect haunts most middle-class homes after it has settled, as a permanent resident rather than a spectre, in the shanty-towns inhabited by the not-yet-

homeless part of the 'lower class' (now in the process of being re-classified as 'underclass'), is not much more realistic than the hope of ending the drought by means of a rain-dance. It looks increasingly likely that the missing comforts of safe existence need to be sought by other means. Safety, like all other aspects of human life in the relentlessly individualised and privatised world, must be a 'do-it-yourself' job. 'Defence of the place', seen as the necessary condition of all safety, must be a 'communal affair'. The trouble is, though, that such communities as have not been made extinct and defunct by the crusades of the nation-building era, are now falling apart under the overwhelming pressures of globalisation; breathing a new lease of life into old communities is not an easy task, while bringing new communities into existence creates new problems of its own.

George Hazeldon, a British-born architect settled in South Africa, had a dream: a city unlike other cities, bristling as they usually do with ominous strangers oozing from dark corners, creeping out of mean streets and leaking from the notoriously rough districts. The city of Hazeldon's dream was a modern version of the medieval town sheltered behind its thick walls, turrets, moats and drawbridges, and cut off securely from the world's risks and dangers. Something, as he said himself, not unlike Mont Saint Michel, simultaneously a monastery and an inaccessible, closely guarded fortress.

As anyone looking at Hazeldon's blueprints would agree, the 'monastery' bit was imagined after the likeness of Rabelais' *Thélème*, that city of compulsory joy and amusement, rather than after the famous hideaway of the otherworldly pious, praying and fasting ascetics. The 'fortress' bit of the dream is, for a change, quite genuine. Heritage Park, the city Hazeldon promises to build from scratch on 500 acres of empty land not far from Cape Town, is to stand out from other towns for its high voltage electric fencing, electronic surveillance of access roads, guarded barriers and heavily armed patrolmen on the beat.

If you can afford to buy yourself into any of the Heritage Park houses, you may spend all your life away from the risks and dangers of the turbulent, inhospitable and frightening wilderness expanding just on the other side of the township's gates. Everything that gracious living needs in order to be complete and wholly satisfying will be catered for: Heritage Park will have its own shops, churches, restaurants, theatres, recreation grounds, forests, central park, salmon-filled lakes, playgrounds, jogging tracks, sports fields and tennis courts – and enough spare sites to add whatever the changing fashion of

decent life may demand in the future. Hazeldon is quite outspoken when it comes to explaining the advantages of Heritage Park over the places where most people nowadays live:

Today the first question is security. Like it or not, it's what makes the difference ... When I grew up in London you had a community. You wouldn't do anything wrong because everyone knew you and they'd tell your mum and dad ... We want to re-create that here, a community which doesn't have to worry.¹¹

So this is what it is all about: for the price of a house in Heritage Park you will buy your entry into *community*. 'Community' is these days the last relic of the old-time utopias of good society; it stands for whatever has been left of the dreams of a better life, shared with better neighbours all obeying better rules of cohabitation. No wonder 'community' is a good selling point. No wonder that Hazeldon the land developer brings it into focus as an indispensable (yet elsewhere missing) supplement to good restaurants and picturesque jogging courses.

Please note, however, what is the sense of that sense-giving communal togetherness: the community Hazeldon remembers from his London childhood years and wants to recreate in the virgin land of South Africa is first and foremost, if not solely, a territory closely surveilled, where whoever does what others may dislike is promptly punished, brought in line or chased away, while loiterers, vagabonds and other intruders are kept at arm's length and out of bounds. The one essential difference, though, between the fondly remembered past and its updated replica is that what the community of Hazeldon's childhood memories did using their own eyes and hands, matter-of-factly and without much thinking, in Heritage Park is to be ceded (hired out?) to hidden TV cameras and dozens of armed security guards checking passes at the gates and discreetly patrolling the streets.

Sharon Zukin describes, after Mike Davis's *City of Quartz* (1990), Los Angeles public spaces as they have been reshaped by the security concerns of the residents and their elected or appointed custodians: 'Helicopters buzz the skies over ghetto neighbourhoods, police hassle teenagers as putative gang members, homeowners buy into the type of armed defence they can afford ... or have nerve enough to use'. The 1960s and early 1970s were, Zukin says, 'a watershed in the institutionalisation of urban fear'.

Voters and élites – a broadly conceived middle class in the United States – could have faced the choice of approving government policies to elimi-

nate poverty, manage ethnic competition, and integrate everyone into common public institutions. Instead, they chose to buy protection, fuelling the growth of the private security industry.

Zukin finds a most tangible danger to what she calls 'public culture' in 'the politics of everyday fear'. The blood-curdling and nerve-breaking spectre of 'unsafe streets' keeps people away from public spaces and turns them away from seeking the art and the skills needed to share in public life.

'Getting tough' on crime by building more prisons and imposing the death penalty are all too common answers to the politics of fear. 'Lock up the whole population', I heard a man say on the bus, at a stroke reducing the solution to its ridiculous extreme. Another answer is to privatise and militarise public space – making streets, parks, and even shops more secure but less free ...¹²

Community translated as armed gatekeepers controlling the entry; stalker and prowler, who have come to replace the early-modern bugbear of *mobile vulgus*, promoted to the rank of the new public enemies number one; reducing public areas to 'defensible' enclaves with selective access; separation in lieu of the negotiation of life in common; and criminalisation of residual difference – these are the principal dimensions of the current evolution of urban life.

As Eric Hobsbawm recently observed, 'never was the word "community" used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense became hard to find in real life'¹³. He explains: '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'.¹⁴ Jock Young supplies a succinct and poignant gloss on the observation and the commentary: 'Just as community collapses, identity is invented'¹⁵.

'Identity', today's talk of the town and the most commonly played game in town, owes the attention it attracts and the passions it begets to being a *surrogate of community*; of that allegedly 'natural home' which is no longer available in the rapidly privatised and individualised, fast globalising world; and for that reason can be safely, with no fear of practical test, imagined as a cosy shelter of security and confidence, and as such is hotly desired. The paradox, though, is that in order to offer even a modicum of security and so to perform any kind of healing or pain-soothing role, identity must belie its origin; it must deny being just a surrogate, and best of all should conjure up a

phantom of the self-same community which it has come to replace. Identity sprouts on the graveyard of communities, but flourishes thanks to the promise of the resurrection of the dead.

Divide et Impera

The 'era of identity' is full of sound and fury. The search for identity divides and separates; yet the precariousness of solitary identity-building prompts the identity-builders to seek pegs on which they can hang together their individually experienced fears and anxieties and perform the exorcism rites in the company of other similarly afraid and anxious individuals. Whether such 'peg communities' provide what they are hoped to offer – a collective insurance against individually confronted risks – is a moot question; but mounting a barricade in the company of others does supply a momentary respite from loneliness. Effective or not, something has been done, and one can at least console oneself that the blows are not being taken lying down. According to Jonathan Friedman, in our fast globalising world 'one thing that is not happening is that boundaries are disappearing. Rather, they seem to be erected on every new street corner of every declining neighbourhood of our world'.¹⁶

Boundaries are not drawn to fence off and protect the distinctness of the already existing identities. As the great Norwegian anthropologist Frederick Barth explained, the opposite is the case: the ostensibly shared 'communal' identities are after-effects or by-products of feverish boundary drawing. It is only after the border-posts have been dug in, that the myths of their antiquity are spun and the recent cultural/political origins of identity are carefully covered up by the 'genesis stories'. This stratagem attempts to belie the fact that (to quote Stuart Hall¹⁷) one thing that the idea of identity does *not* signal is a 'stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change'.

If the principle of nation-state 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 need be no longer seriously reckoned with in the global powers' calculations, then the replacement of the 'world of nations' by the supra-national 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 precarisation'¹⁸ is equally, if not more, likely to follow.

If the blow delivered to state sovereignty proves fatal, if the state loses its monopoly on 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 civilised 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 'communal' (neo-tribal) level. It is crucially important to grasp that the tendency to communal separation, neo-tribal, fundamentalist and essentialist sentiments, and the growing popularity of exclusion as the prime way to deal with insecure conditions are *not* the hiccups of the not-yet-fully extinguished but outdated urges bound to be eventually smothered by the relentlessly advancing globalisation; neither are they at cross-purposes with the interests and intentions of the global powers. They are legitimate residents in the house of globalisation, welcomed, encouraged and if not actively cultivated, then at least willingly tolerated by the landlords. As Richard Rorty suggests, there is good reason to suppose that the neo-tribal hatreds 'on the ground', far from being seen as an obstacle to the globalisation of human community, play into the hands of the globalising élites:

The aim will be to keep the minds of the proles elsewhere – to keep the bottom 75 per cent of Americans and the bottom 95 per cent of the world's population busy with ethnic and religious hostilities ... If the proles can be distracted from their own despair by media-created pseudo-events, including the occasional brief and bloody war, the super-rich will have little to fear.¹⁹

In the absence of the institutional frame of 'arboretic' structures (to use the notorious Deleuze/Guattari metaphors), sociality may well return to its 'explosive' manifestations, spreading rhizomically and sprouting formations of varying degrees of durability, but all invariably unstable, hotly contested and devoid of reliable foundations – apart from the passionate, frenetic actions of their adherents. The endemic instability of foundations would need to be compensated for. An active (whether willing or enforced) complicity in the crimes which only the continuous existence of '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, enemies to be collectively persecuted, tortured and mutilated, in order to make every member of community into an accessory to what, in case the battle were lost, would be most certainly declared to be a crime against humanity, and prosecuted.

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. The violent urge is always seething just under the calm surface of peaceful and friendly cooperation; it needs to be channelled beyond the boundaries of community in order to cut off the communal island of tranquillity where violence is prohibited. Violence, which otherwise would call the bluff of communal unity, is thereby re-cycled into the weapon of communal defence. In this re-cycled form it is indispensable; it needs to be re-staged endlessly in the form of sacrificial rites, for which a surrogate victim is selected according to hardly ever explicit, yet nevertheless strict rules. 'There is a common denominator that determines the efficacy of all sacrifices'. This common denominator is

internal violence – all the dissensions, rivalries, jealousy, 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 their purpose of keeping the memory of the communal unity, as well as the awareness of its present precariousness, alive. 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 "sacrificable"' (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 outsiders, but not too distant; similar to 'us, community's sons and daughters', yet unmistakably different. The act of sacrificing these objects is meant, after all, to draw tight and unsurpassable boundaries between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of the community. It 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 ... 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 community.

The absence of social links with the 'legitimate' members of the community (or the prohibition to establish such links) has an added advantage: victims 'can be exposed to violence without risk of vengeance';²⁰ 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 reminding insiders that the ranks must be kept closed, thereby keeping the vigour and vigilance of community at the highest pitch.

There is little prospect, it seems, for an imminent end to tribal warfare, a universal consensus or even an armistice; for the urge to self-separation, boundary-drawing, fence-building and the exclusion of unwelcome 'others' soon grinding to a halt. Perhaps instead of talking about identities, inherited or acquired, it would be more in keeping with the realities of the globalising world to speak of the '*identification* push', a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged. There is little chance that the tensions, confrontations and conflicts which that activity generates will subside.

Let me repeat: the frantic search for identity is not a residue of the pre-globalisation times not-yet-fully-extirpated but bound to become extinct as globalisation progresses; it is, on the contrary, the side-effect and by-product of the combination of globalising and individualising pressures, and the tensions they spawn. The identification wars are neither contrary nor stand in the way of the globalising tendency: they are a legitimate offspring and natural companion of globalisation, and far from arresting it, lubricate its wheels.

NOTES

1. See Paul Virilio, *Polar Inertia*, transl. by Patrick Camiller, London: Sage 1999.
2. Richard Sennett, 'Growth and Failure: The New Political Economy and Its Culture', in Mike Featherstone & Scott Lash (eds), *Spaces of Culture: City-Nation-World*, London: Sage 1999, p.15.
3. Jonathan Friedman, 'The Hybridization of Roots and the Abhorrence of the Bush', in *Spaces of Culture*, p.234.
4. Richard Rorty, *Achieving our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth Century America*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998, pp.85-6. While Rorty's diagnosis of the harm done to the rapid 'proleterianising' of the vast majority of the American population is utterly convincing, the remedy proposed is anything but uncontroversial. Rorty admits as much (though only in a footnote unassimilated into the main current of the argument). He recalls Orlando Patterson proposing in October 1996 that the Mexican border would have to be closed to protect the jobs and standards of American workers, and being subsequently heckled: 'What about the workers in the Third World?'. Rorty comments: 'I suspect that the issue Patterson raised will be the most deeply divisive that the American Left will face in the twenty-first century'. He adds, wistfully: 'I wish that I had some good ideas about how the dilemma might be resolved, but I do not' (pp.148-9). Not having ideas is also a choice. It signals unwillingness to raise the old issue of social justice to the same level of globality which the factors of injustice have already reached.
5. Nik Gowing, 'Real-Time TV Coverage from War: Does it Make or Break Government Policy?', in James Gow, Richard Paterson, & Alison Preston (eds), *Bosnia by Television*, London: British Film Institute, 1996, pp.83-4.
6. See Francis Pisani, 'Penser la cyberguerre', *Le Monde diplomatique*, August 1999, pp.4-5.
7. See Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War*, New York: Warner, 1994.
8. See Steve Wright, 'Hyprocrisie des armes non létales', *Le Monde diplomatique*, December 1999, pp.24-5.
9. William D. Hartung, 'Ready for What? The New Politics of Pentagon Spending', in *World Policy Journal*, Spring 1999. Here quoted after Steve Wright.
10. See Jürgen Habermas, 'Bestialität und Humanität: Ein Krieg in der Grenze zwischen Recht und Moral', *Die Zeit*, 29 April 1999. Translation by Stephen Mayer and William E. Scheuerman, under the title 'Bestiality and Humanity: A War on the Border between Legality and Morality', *Constellations*, September 1999, pp.263-72.
11. Quoted after Chris McGreal, 'Fortress Town to Rise on Cape of Low Hopes', *The Guardian*, 22 January 1999.
12. Sharon Zukin, *The Culture of Cities*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, pp.39,38.
13. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, London: Michael Joseph, 1994, p.428.
14. Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Cult of Identity Politics', *New Left Review*, 217, 1996, p.40.
15. Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society*, London: Sage, 1999, p.164.
16. Jonathan Friedman, 'The Hybridization of Roots and the Abhorrence of the Bush', in *Spaces of Culture*, p.241.
17. Stuart Hall, 'Who Needs "Identity"?', in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage, 1996, p.1.

18. See Pierre Bourdieu, 'La précarité est aujourd'hui partout', in *Contre-feu*, Paris: Raison d'Agir, 1998, pp.95-101.
19. Rorty, *Achieving our Country*, p.88.
20. René Girard, *La violence et le sacré*, Paris: Grasset, 1972. Here quoted after Patrick Gregory's English translation, *Violence and the Sacred*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, pp.8,12,13.

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