

# The fate of humanity in the post-Trinitarian world

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*Habent sua fata libelli* . . . The fate of Kant's *Ideen Zu Einer Allgemeinen Geschichte in Weltbürlicher Absicht* has been as thought provoking and illuminating as it was peculiar. Conceived in 1784 in Kant's tranquil, off-the-beaten-track Königsberg seclusion, that little book quietly gathered dust for two centuries in academic libraries. If read at all, it was only by a few dedicated archivists of ideas, without much excitement, as a historic curiosity and a trace of an odd lighter moment in the great philosopher's life of consistent scholarly pedantry. But after two centuries of exile to the footnotes and bibliographies of scholarly monographs, the little book burst all of a sudden into the very centre of the *Jetztzeitgeschichte*. In stark opposition to the recent past, it would be a tall order these days to find a learned study of the convolutions and challenges of our jointly lived-through current history that would not quote Kant's *Allgemeine Geschichte* as a supreme authority and source of inspiration for all debate on *human rights* – another issue that has recently made a stunning comeback from the small print of footnotes to the bold-letter text of the mainstream narrative to land, noisily, in the very centre of public attention.

The *fatum* of this particular *libellae* may seem strange and baffling, but it holds in fact little mystery. Its secret is simple. It took the world no less than two hundred years to reach, quite recently, the limits of a tendency that had guided it since the beginning of modern times; the selfsame tendency which Kant, having put it to an early philosophical test, would have found in advance contrary to *was die Natur zur höchsten Absicht hat*.

Kant observed that the planet we inhabit is a sphere – and thought through the consequences of that admittedly banal fact: namely, that as we all stay and move on the surface of that sphere, we have nowhere else to go and hence are bound to live forever in each other's neighbourhood and company. Moving on the spherical surface, you will end up by shortening the distance as you try to stretch it. All effort to lengthen a distance and to keep it long cannot but be ultimately self-defeating. And so *die vollkommene bürgerliche Vereinigung in der Menschengattung* is the destiny Nature has chosen for us – the ultimate horizon of our *allgemeine Geschichte* that, prompted and guided by reason and the instinct of self-preservation, we are bound to pursue and, in the fullness of time, reach. This is what Kant found out – but it took the world two more centuries to find out how right he was.

Sooner or later, Kant warned, there will be not a scrap of empty space left in which those of us who have found the already populated places too cramped or too inhospitable for comfort, awkward or for whatever other reason uncongenial, could seek shelter or rescue. And so Nature commands us to view (reciprocal) hospitality as the supreme precept which we need – and eventually will have to – embrace and obey in order to end the long chain of trials and errors, the catastrophes the errors caused and the devastations the catastrophes left in their wake. As Jacques Derrida would observe two hundred years later

(Derrida 1997), Kant's propositions would easily expose the present-day buzz-words like 'culture of hospitality' or 'ethics of hospitality' as mere tautologies: 'L'hospitalité, c'est la culture même et se n'est pas une éthique parmi d'autres . . . *L'éthique est hospitalité*' ['Hospitality is culture itself and not one ethics among many . . . *ethics is hospitality*']. Indeed, if ethics, as Kant wished, is a work of reason, then hospitality is – must be or sooner or later become – the ethically guided and self-preservation conscious mankind's first rule of conduct.

All of this Kant's readers could gather two centuries ago – but the world, though, took little notice. It seems that the world prefers to honour its philosophers with memorial plaques rather than by listening to them, let alone following their advice. Philosophers might have been the main heroes of the Enlightenment lyrical drama, but the post-Enlightenment epic tragedy all but neglected their lines. Busy with equating nations and states, states with sovereignty, and sovereignty with a territory with tightly sealed and controlled borders, the world seemed to pursue a horizon quite different from the one Kant had drawn. For two hundred years the world was occupied with making the control of human movements the sole prerogative of state powers, with erecting barriers to all the other, uncontrolled human movements, and manning the barriers with vigilant and heavily armed guards. Passports, entry and exit visas, custom and immigration controls were among the major inventions of the art of modern government.

The advent of the modern state coincided with the emergence of the 'stateless persons', the *sans papiers*, and the idea of *unwertes Leben*, the latter-day reincarnation<sup>1</sup> of the ancient institution of *homo sacer*, that ultimate embodiment of the sovereign right to exempt and exclude any such human being as has been cast beyond the limits of human and divine laws and to make it into a being to whom no laws apply and whose destruction commands no punishment while 'being' is devoid of all ethical or religious significance.

## Man and citizen

Five years after Kant had written down his conclusions and sent them to the printer, another, even shorter document was published – one that was to weigh on the next two centuries of history and on the minds of its principal actors much more heavily than Kant's little book. That other document was *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, of which Giorgio Agamben would observe, with the benefit of long hindsight, that it did not make clear whether the two terms [*man* and *citizen*] were to name two distinct realities or whether, instead, the first term was always meant to be 'already contained in the second'<sup>2</sup> – that is, the bearer of rights was the man who was also (or in so far as he was) a citizen.

That unclarity, with all its gruesome consequences, had been noted before by Hannah Arendt – in a world suddenly filling up with 'displaced persons'. Arendt recalled Edmund Burke's old and genuinely prophetic premonition<sup>3</sup> that the abstract nakedness of 'being nothing but human' was humanity's greatest danger. 'Human rights', as Burke noted, were an abstraction, and humans could expect little protection from 'human rights' unless the abstraction was filled with the flesh of the Englishman's or a Frenchman's rights. 'The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human' – Arendt thus summed up the experience of the centuries that followed Burke's observations. 'The Rights of Man, supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable . . . whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of 'any sovereign state' (Arendt 1986: 300, 293).

Indeed, human beings endowed with 'human rights' but with nothing more than that – with no other, more defensible since better institutionally rooted rights to contain and

hold 'human' rights in place – were nowhere to be found and were, to all practical intents, unimaginable. A social, all-too-social, *puissance*, *potenza* or *Macht*<sup>4</sup> was obviously needed to endorse the humanity of humans. And throughout the modern era, such 'potency' happened to be, invariably, the potency to draw a boundary between human and inhuman, in modern times disguised as the boundary between citizens and foreigners. On the earth sliced into estate properties of sovereign states, the homeless are without rights, and they suffer not because they are not equal before the law – but because there is no law that applies to them and to which they could refer in their complaints against the rough deal they have been accorded or whose protection they could claim.

In her essay on Karl Jaspers penned down a few years after the *Origins of Totalitarianism*,<sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt (1993) observed that though for all the preceding generations 'humanity' was but a concept or an ideal (we may add: a philosophical postulate, humanists' dream, sometimes a war-cry, but hardly ever an organizing principle of political action), it 'has become something of an urgent reality'. It has become a matter of extreme urgency because of the impact of the West that has saturated the rest of the world with the products of its technological development, but that has also exported to the rest of the world 'its processes of disintegration' – among which the breakdown of metaphysical and religious beliefs, awesome advances of natural sciences and the ascendancy of the nation-state as virtually the sole form of government figured most prominently. The forces which required long centuries to 'undermine the ancient beliefs and political ways of life' in the West, 'took only a few decades to break down . . . beliefs and ways of life in all other parts of the world'.

Such unification, Arendt suggests, could not but produce a 'solidarity of mankind' that is 'entirely negative'. Each part of the human population of the earth is made vulnerable by all of the other parts and each of the other parts. This is, we may say, 'solidarity' of dangers, risks and fears. For most of the time and in most thoughts, 'unity of the planet' boils down to the horror of threats gestating or incubated in distant parts of the world – the world 'reaching out yet itself out of reach'. A John Donne of our days would perhaps modify the admonition contained in his *Devotions*: 'never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee – the death knell'. But he would it seems hold to the observation that 'no man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of Continent, a part of the main' – only it would mean now, first and foremost, that one can no longer count on the secure shelter of islands which used to exist in simpler and poorer times. On a continent crisscrossed by rail and motorways – as all continents nowadays are – there is nowhere to hide. There is no place left 'away from beaten tracks', or 'far from the madding crowd' – however passionate and hectic are the efforts to keep the crowds away from the gates and fences and make the tracks accessible to selected users only and for selected use.

### **The human waste of social order**

For two hundred years or so after the publication of Kant's musings, the progressive 'filling of the world' (and so, consequently, the urge to admit that the fullness of the planet Kant thought to be an unavoidable, the no-appeal-allowed verdict of Reason and Nature rolled into one, was indeed eminent) was fought back with the help of the (un)holy trinity of territory, nation, and state.

The nation-state, as Giorgio Agamben observes, is a state that makes 'nativity or birth' the 'foundation of its own sovereignty.' 'The fiction that is implicit here', Agamben points

out, 'is that *birth* [*nascita*] comes into being immediately as *nation*, so that there may not be any difference between the two moments' (Agamben 2000: 21). One is, so to speak, *born* into the 'citizenship of the state'; this nakedness of the newly born child yet unwrapped in the legal/juridical trappings provides the site on which the sovereignty of the state power is constructed and perpetually rebuilt and serviced with the help of the inclusion/exclusion practices aimed at all other claimants of citizenship that fell into the reach of the state's sovereignty. We may hypothesize that the reduction of *bios* to *zoë* that Agamben takes for the essence of modern sovereignty (or, we may say as well, the reduction of the *Leib*, the living-acting body, to the *Körper*, a body that can be acted upon but cannot act) is a foregone conclusion once birth is selected as the only 'natural', no-questions-asked entry into the nation.

All other claimants who may knock at the door of the sovereign state asking to be admitted may first be submitted to the de-robing ritual. As Victor Turner suggested following Van Gennep's three-stage scheme of *rite de passage*, before the newcomers to a social site who apply for admission are given access (if access is given) to a new wardrobe where the dresses appropriate to the new site and reserved for that site are stocked, they need to be stripped (metaphorically as well as literally) of all and any trappings of their previous belonging. They must remain for a while in the state of 'social nakedness'. A quarantine period is needed in the non-space of 'betwixt and between', where no clothes of socially approved significance are on offer and none is permitted; a purgatory of the intermediate 'nowhere space' that separates the plots in the world sliced into plots and conceived as aggregation of spatially separate plots separates the newcomers from their new belonging. Inclusion must be preceded by a radical exclusion.

According to Turner, the stopover in the site denuded of all socially supplied jacks able to lift campers from the level of *zoë* or *Körper* to that of *bios* or *Leib*, 'the social significance of rendering them [the travellers on their way from one lost social denomination to another, not-yet-acquired one] down into some kind of human *primo materia*, divested of specific form and reduced to a condition that, although it is still social, is without or beneath all accepted forms of status' is that there is no direct way leading from one to another socially approved status. Before one can pass from one status to another, one needs to immerse and dissolve in 'an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *communitas* . . .' (Turner 1969: 170, 96).

Hannah Arendt situated the phenomenon later explored by Turner in the power-operated realm of expulsion, exile, exclusion and exemption. Humanity that takes 'the form of fraternity', she implied, 'is the great privilege of pariah peoples' (those who in the public debates of the eighteenth century were talked about under the generic name of *les malheureux*, in those of the nineteenth century were re-branded as *les misérables*, and today, since the middle of the past century, are crowded under the umbrella notion of 'the refugees' – but have been at all times deprived of a place of their own on the mental map of the world drawn by people who coined and deployed their names). Rammed, cramped and crushed by multiple rejections, 'the persecuted have moved so closely together that the interspace which we have called world (and which of course existed between them before the persecution, keeping them at a distance from one another) has simply disappeared'.<sup>6</sup> To all practical intents and purposes they were *out of the world*: the world of categories and fine distinctions which the powers that be had spawned and made known under the name of 'society' – the only world the humans were supposed to inhabit and the only world that could re-form its denizens into citizens, the bearers and practitioners of rights. They were *uniform* – in their common lack of such attributes as vernacular speakers would be able to note, grasp, name and comprehend. Or at least 'uniform' they seemed to be – due to the

alliance between the poverty of the vernacular and the power-assisted homogenization-through-expropriation-of rights.

Indeed, if birth and nation are one, than all others who enter or wish to enter the national family must mimic, or are compelled to emulate, the nakedness of the newborn. The state – the guardian and prison guard, the spokesman and the censor-in-chief of the nation – would see to it that this condition is met.

As Carl Schmitt, arguably the most clear-headed, illusion-free anatomist of the modern state, avers: ‘He who determines a value, *eo ipso* always fixes a nonvalue. The sense of this determination of a nonvalue is the annihilation of the nonvalue’ (Schmitt 1963: 80).<sup>7</sup> Determining the value draws the limits of the normal, the ordinary, the orderly. Non-value is an exception that marks this boundary. The exception is that which cannot be subsumed; it defies general codification, but it simultaneously reveals a specifically juridical formal element: the decision in absolute purity. There is no rule that is applicable to chaos. Order must be established for juridical order to make sense. A regular situation must be created, and sovereign is he who definitely decides if this situation is actually effective.

The exception does not only confirm the rule; the rule as such lives off the exception alone (Schmitt 1922: 19–21).<sup>8</sup>

Giorgio Agamben comments:

The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it. The state of exception is thus not the chaos that preceded order but rather the situation that results from its suspension. In this sense, the exception is truly, according to its etymological root, *taken outside (ex-capere)*, and not simply excluded. (Agamben 1998: 18)

Let me observe that this is precisely the circumstance which the rule-making sovereigns, to legitimize and see through their actions, need to occlude. Order-making tends to be, as a rule, undertaken in the name of fighting the chaos. But there would be no chaos were there no ordering intention already in place and were not the ‘regular situation’ already conceived in advance so that its promotion could start in earnest. Chaos is born as a non-value, an exception. Ordering bustle is its birthplace – and it has no other *legitimate* parents or family home.

## The (un)holy trinity

Penetrating and insightful as he is when scrutinizing the bizarre, paradoxical logic of *Ordnung*, Carl Schmitt endorses the fiction cultivated by the guardians/promoters of order, the wielders of the sovereign power of exception, on one crucial point. Just as in the sovereigns’ body of practice, so in Schmitt’s theoretical model the boundaries of the territory over which the work of *Ordnung* is conducted are presumed to constitute the outer limits of the world endowed with topical relevance for ordering intentions and efforts. In Schmitt’s vision, just as in the *doxa* of lawmakers, the sum total of resources required if the ordering job is to be done, as well as the totality of factors necessary to account for its operation and effects, is contained inside that world. Sovereignty produces the distinction between the value and non-value, the rule and exception – but this operation is preceded by the distinction between the inside and the outside of the sovereign realm, without which the sovereign prerogatives neither could be claimed nor would be obtained. Sovereignty as practised by the modern nation-state and as theorized by Schmitt is inextricably bound to

a *territory*. Sovereignty is unthinkable without an ‘outside’; it is inconceivable in any form but a *localized* entity. Schmitt’s vision is as ‘localized’ as the sovereignty whose mystery it aims to unravel. It does not step beyond the practice and cognitive horizon of the made-in-heaven wedlock of territory and power.

As the ‘state of law’ was gradually, but irresistibly (since under constant pressures of legitimacy-building and ideological mobilization) evolving into the ‘nation’s state’, the wedlock has grown into a trinity – of territory, state and nation. One may suppose that the advent of that trinity was a historical accident that occurred in one, relatively small part of the globe; but since that part, however small, happened to claim the position of metropolis resourceful enough to transform the rest of the globe into periphery and arrogant enough to pointedly overlook or denigrate its peculiarities, and since it is the prerogative of the metropolis to set the rules by which the periphery should live and since it is in its power to enforce the observance of those rules, the overlap/blend of the nation, state and territory has become the norm. Any one of the trinity members, if un-allied with and unsupported by the other two, has been turned into anomaly: into a monstrous mutation bound to undergo drastic surgery or to receive a *coup de grâce* in case of being found beyond redemption. Territory with no nation-state had become a no-man’s land; nation without a state had become a noxious, obstreperous and obtrusive alien body given the choice of surrender or annihilation, a state without a nation or with more than one nation had turned into a residue of time past faced with a dilemma to modernize or perish. Behind the new normality loomed the sense-giving principle of territoriality of any power bidding for sovereignty and of all power standing the chance of the bid being granted or won.

All bids for purity deposit dirt, all bids for order create monsters. The dirty monsters of the promotion-of-the-territory/nation/state-trinity era were nations without states, states with more than one nation and territory without nation-state. It was thanks to the threat and fear of those monsters that the sovereign power could claim and acquire the right to deny rights and set such conditions for humanity that a great part of humanity, as it happened, could not meet.

### Life unworthy of living

In 1920, a booklet had been published under the title *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Leben*, authored by the penal law expert Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche, professor of medicine, and commonly credited with the introduction of the *unwertes Leben* (‘life unworthy of living’) concept and the suggestion that in societies thus far such life has been unduly and unjustly protected at the expense of the fully fledged life that should command all the attention and loving care owed to humanity. The learned experts saw no reason (whether juridical, social or religious) why the extermination of *unwertes Leben* should be seen as a crime and thus as a punishable act.

In Binding/Hoche’s conception Giorgio Agamben spies a resuscitation and an updated, modern articulation of the ancient category of *homo sacer*: of a human being that could be killed without punishment yet whose murder is devoid of both social and religious significance. He also observes that the concept of ‘life unworthy of being lived’ is – as the concept of *homo sacer* always was – non-ethical; but that in its modern rendition it acquires the profound political significance of a category ‘on which sovereign power is founded’.

In modern biopolitics, sovereign is he/she who decides on the value or the non-value of life as such. Life, which with the declaration of rights had as such been invested with

the principle of sovereignty, now itself becomes the place of a sovereign decision (Agamben 1998: 142).

This seems indeed to be the case. But it could be a case in so far only as the territory/state/nation trinity has been lifted to the rank of the universal principle of human cohabitation, imposed and bound to bind every nook and cranny of the planet, including even such areas that for centuries failed to acquire elementary conditions of such trinity (that is, homogeneity of the population and/or permanent settlement resulting in 'rootedness in the soil'). It is because of that contrived and enforced universality of the Trinitarian principle that, as Hannah Arendt points out, 'whoever was thrown out of one of these tightly organized communities found himself *thrown* out of the family of nations altogether' (Arendt 1986: 204) – and so, as human species became identical with the 'family of nations', from the realm of humanity into the nowhere-land of *homini sacri*.

### The long intermezzo

It was thanks to the territory/nation/state trinity (alliance? mixture? blend?) that Kant's warning/premonition could gather dust for two centuries and – if read by the few dedicated archivists of human ideas – be explained away by the momentary lapse of scientific rigour in the otherwise pedantically elegant thought and exemplarily disciplined life of the pioneer and a most devoted evangelist of modern reason. As long as the Trinity stayed in full, virtually unchallenged command, the roundness of the globe seemed of no consequence and the prediction of the imminent fullness of the planet was taken to be, if treated generously, the yarn of which science-fiction amusing stories or fairy tales are spun.

Despite its magnitude and the depth of its suffering, the human detritus sedimented in ever rising volume by the including/excluding zeal and bustle triggered and consistently reinforced by the territory/nation/state trinity seemed to carry the marks of a transient and essentially curable irritant rather than to be a portent of the catastrophe to come. Dark clouds seemed lighter and dark premonition could be laughed away as 'prophecies of doom' – thanks mostly to another modern enterprise that went down in history under the names of 'imperialism' and 'colonization' and served, alongside its other functions, as the disposal-and-recycling plant for the growing supplies of human waste. The breathtakingly vast expanses of the 'virgin land' that the imperialist invading/conquering/annexing drive had laid open for colonization could be used as a dumping ground for those unwanted at home, and act as a promised land for those who fell by or were thrown overboard as the vehicle of progress picked up speed and gained ground.

No land of course *was* really 'virgin' at the time Kant's *Allgemeine Geschichte* went to the printers; but plenty of lands had been already *made* virgin and many more were to be recast as 'virgin' in the following decades, thanks to the enormous and still rapidly widening power differential between the fast industrializing centre and rapidly deteriorating periphery. The power of the metropolis was so overwhelming that it could declare the extant human habitation of the 'primitive', 'backward' and 'savage' lands null and void, and summarily recast the population of such lands as a collective '*homo sacer*' of the metropolis – thereby offering the metropolitan population a licence to kill. When somewhat later the technique of summary exclusion from the human race, developed during the conquest of distant lands, was to ricochet on Europe, Aimé Césaire pointed out (in 1955<sup>9</sup>) that what the Christian bourgeois (of Europe and its extensions) could not really forgive Hitler was not the crime of genocide as such (by then it was an acknowledged, legitimate method of dealing with

the vexing presence of undesirables), but the crime of having applied to Europe the colonialist actions meant till now to be borne by the Arabs, the coolies of India, Negroes and other 'aborigines' of distant lands.

So that Europe could get rid of the domestic outcasts, the lands decreed as virgin provided the indispensable Devil's Islands, Botany Bays and other similar dumping grounds for European governments envious of the infinite permafrost expanses of Siberia ruled by the Russian Empire. For such Europeans as feared the outcasts' lot, the 'virginized lands' offered salvation – a hideout or even a chance to start a new, this time round prosperous, life. Irish villagers sought there rescue from potato-blight famine at home; German, Swedish and Polish peasants sought there a more alluring, or just more bearable alternative to overcrowded villages and decaying townships with no jobs and no prospects; Jews ran there from Russian pogroms. The untitled offspring of titled families and disinherited scions of the rich travelled to the 'frontiers of civilization' hoping to restore their nobility and wealth thanks to the brand new, and ample, career tracks in expeditionary military service, colonial administration, overseas trade companies and business ventures. For many years, modernity, that intrinsically expansive and transgressive civilization, had no reason to worry: the civilization made of the urge for expansion and transgression had seemingly infinite space to expand and could look forward to endless new barriers waiting to be transgressed.

On the map of the modern world, there was indeed a seemingly self-replenishing profusion of blank spots marked (always but provisionally, of course!) '*ubi leones*', and waiting to be spattered with new towns and crisscrossed with new road networks. For almost two centuries, those distant blank spots served the modernizing metropolis as reliable safety valves that let out the steam and protected the metropolis from overheating. There were a lot of places for the adventurous to seek adventure, for gamblers to try their luck and for the defeated to attempt to reverse bad fortune. The world was anything but full.

Well, it was not full then – but it is now. No more Statues of Liberty promising to shelter the downtrodden and abandoned masses. No more escape tracks and hideouts for anyone but the few misfits and criminals. But (this being, arguably, the most striking effect of the world's newly revealed fullness) – no more the safe and cosy *chez soi* either; as the events of 11 September have proved dramatically and beyond reasonable doubt.

## Awakening to the planet's fullness

Colonization allowed Kant's premonitions to gather dust. However, it also made them look, when finally dusted off, like a prophecy of an apocalypse instead of the cheerful utopia Kant intended them to be. Kant's vision looks now that way because, owing to the misleading abundance of 'no man's land', nothing had to be done and thus nothing has been done in the course of these past two centuries to prepare humanity for the revelation of the ultimate fullness of the world.

As the last spots bearing '*ubi leones*' tags are vanishing from the world map and the last among the many distant frontier-lands have been claimed by powers potent enough to seal borders and deny entry visas, the world in its entirety is turning into a planetary frontier-land. According to Eric le Boucher's summary of the new wisdom that was forced upon us on 11 September, 'the world cannot divide itself into two separate parts – one rich and secure behind its modern anti-missile system, the other left . . . to its wars and "archaisms"' <sup>10</sup>. After 11 September, it has become clear that the 'far-away countries can no more be left to their anarchy' – that is, if the rich and allegedly secure populations want



to stay rich and be secure indeed. Ask no more where the 'frontier-land' can be found; it is *here*, all around you, all around your city and in the city itself, in the city centre as much as in the *banlieux*, notorious as they are as the sort of places in which everything can happen but little can be done, any action being but an experiment that can proceed only through a risk-infested obstacle course of trials and errors.

In the frontier-land, it is guns and slyness that count, but agility and cunning count more than the largest stack of guns. In the frontier-land, fences and stockades mark intentions rather than realities. In a frontier-land, the efforts to give conflicts territorial dimensions and to keep the differences apart and at a safe distance from each other by dividing the ground seldom bring results. Suspected from the start to be ultimately ineffective, such efforts tend to be half-hearted anyway; wooden stakes signal the lack of self-assurance that stone walls would manifest. In the course of interminable frontier-land warfare, trenches are seldom dug. The adversaries are known to be constantly on the move. Their might and nuisance-making ability lie in their speed, inconspicuousness and the randomness of their moves. For all practical intents and purposes, in a frontier-land adversaries are *extraterritorial*.

The threats of terrorist attacks 11-September style were on the cards for a long time, as they should have been under increasingly frontier-land conditions. The threats emanated from existential insecurity, massively generated inside the uncolonized, politically uncontrolled, thoroughly deregulated and extraterritorial 'space of flows' (to use Manuel Castells's terms). But the materialization of such threats in the dramatic and exquisitely spectacular form they took on 11 September has re-forged the premonitions onto tangible reality, drawn the invisible within sight and the distant within the neighbourhood. It thereby allowed the threat to be translated from the opaque and seldom resorted to language of *global* security, arousing little emotion (a bland and semantically impoverished language with few if any syntactic rules) into the all-too-familiar, daily used and easily understood language of *personal* safety. The good news is in the longer run that translation may assist the comprehension of the link between the two, and even enable the reverse translation of local safety concerns into global security issues. The bad news is that for the time being one thing that has been made crystal clear is the present-day *mutually assured vulnerability* of all politically separated parts of the globe.

That manifestation of the changed existential condition took us unawares, as the change itself took us unprepared. The sacrosanct division between *dedans* and *dehors*, which charted the realm of existential security and set the itinerary for future transcendence, has been all but obliterated. *Il n'y a pas du 'dehors'* any more – we are all 'in', with nothing left outside. Or, rather, what used to be 'outside' entered the 'inside' – without knocking; and settled there – without asking permission. The bluff of local solutions to planetary problems has been called; the sham of territorial isolation has been exposed.

Frontier-lands of all times have been known as, simultaneously, factories of displacement and recycling plants for the displaced. Nothing else can be expected from their new, global variety – except of course the new, planetary scale of the production and recycling problems. Let me repeat: there are no local solutions to global problems – although it is precisely the local solutions that are avidly, though in vain, sought by the extant political institutions, the sole political institutions that we have collectively invented thus far and the only ones we have. Embroiled as these institutions have been from the start and throughout their history in the passionate (Herculean in its intention, Sisyphean in practice) efforts to seal the union of state and nation with territory, no wonder all such institutions have become and remained local, and their sovereign power of feasible (or, indeed, *legitimate*) action is locally circumscribed.

## Garrisons of extraterritoriality

During the two centuries of modern history, the refugees, the voluntary and involuntary migrants, the 'displaced persons' *tout court*, were naturally assumed to be the host country's affair and handled as such.

Few if any of the nation-states that filled the map of the modern world were as local as their sovereign prerogatives. Sometimes willingly, at other times reluctantly, virtually all of them had to accept the presence of aliens inside the appropriated territory, and admit the successive waves of immigrants escaping or chased away from the realms of other sovereign nation-state powers. Once inside, however, the settled or brand new aliens alike fell under the exclusive and undivided jurisdiction of the host country. That country was free to deploy the updated, modernized versions of the two strategies which have been described in *Tristes tropiques* by Claude Lévi-Strauss as the alternative ways of dealing with the presence of strangers – and when choosing to resort to such strategies it could count on the wholehearted support of all other sovereign powers on the planet, mindful to preserve the inviolability of the territory/nation/state trinity.

The available choice was between anthropophagic and anthropoemic solutions to the strangers' problem. The first solution boiled down to 'eating the strangers up'. Either literally, in flesh – as in cannibalism allegedly practised by certain ancient tribes – or in its sublimated, spiritual version – as in the power-assisted cultural assimilation practised almost universally by nation-states with the intention to ingest the carriers of alien culture into the national body while dumping off the indigestible parts of their cultural dowry. The second solution meant 'vomiting the strangers' instead of devouring them: rounding them up and expelling (just what Oriana Fallaci suggested we, the Europeans, should do with people who adore other gods and display baffling toilet habits) either from the realm of the state power or from the world of the living.

Let us note, however that pursuing either of these two solutions made sense only on the twin assumptions: of a clean-cut territorial division between the 'inside' and the 'outside', and of the completeness and indivisibility of sovereignty of the strategy-selecting power within its realm. None of the two assumptions commands much credibility today, in our liquid-modern global world, and so the chances of deploying either of the two orthodox strategies are, to say the least, slim.

The tested ways of acting being no more available, we seem to be left with no good strategy to handle the newcomers. This because, in the times when no cultural model can authoritatively and effectively claim its superiority over competitive models, and when nation-building and patriotic mobilization ceased to be the principal instrument of social integration and state's self-assertion, cultural assimilation is no longer on the cards. Since deportations and expulsions make dramatic and rather disturbing television and are likely to trigger a public outcry and tarnish the international credentials of the perpetrators, most governments prefer to steer clear of trouble if they can, by locking their doors to all who knock asking for shelter.

The present trend to drastically reduce the right to political asylum, accompanied by the stout refusal of entry to 'economic migrants' (except the few and transient moments when business threatens to travel where labour is, unless labour is brought where business wants it to be), signal no new strategy regarding the refugee phenomenon – but the *absence of strategy*, and the wish to avoid a situation in which that absence causes political embarrassment. Under the circumstances, the terrorist assault of 11 September helped the politicians enormously. In addition to the usually brandished charges of sponging on the nation's welfare and stealing its jobs,<sup>11</sup> refugees can now be accused of playing a 'fifth

column' role on behalf of the global terrorist network. At long last, there is a 'rational' and morally unassailable reason to round up, incarcerate and deport people whom one does not know any more how to handle and does not want to take the trouble to find out. In the USA, and soon after in Britain, under the banner of 'anti-terrorist campaign', foreigners have been promptly deprived of the essential human rights that until now have withstood all vicissitudes of history since the Magna Carta and Habeas Corpus. Foreigners can now be detained indefinitely on charges against which they cannot defend themselves since they are not told what these are. As Martin Thomas acidly observes, from now on, in a dramatic reversal of the basic principle of civilized law, the 'proof of a criminal charge is a redundant complication' – at least as far as foreign refugees are concerned.<sup>12</sup>

The doors may be locked but the problem will not go away, however tight the locks. Locks do nothing to tame or weaken the forces that cause displacement and make humans into refugees. The locks may help to keep the problem out of sight and out of mind, but not to force it out of existence.

And so, increasingly, refugees find themselves in the crossfire; more exactly, in a double bind. They are expelled by force or frightened into flying out of their native countries, but refused entry to any other. They do not *change* places; they *lose* their place on earth, they are catapulted into a nowhere, into Augé's '*non-lieux*' or Garreau's 'nowherevilles', into Michel Foucault's '*Narrenschiffen*', into a drifting 'place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea' (Foucault 1986: 26) – or (as Michel Agier suggests in a forthcoming article in *Ethnography*) in a desert, by definition an *un*-inhabited land, the land resentful of humans and seldom visited by them.

Refugees have become, in a caricatured likeness of the new power elite of the globalized world, the epitome of that extraterritoriality where the roots of the present-day *precarité* of human condition, that foremost of present-day human fears and anxieties, are sunk. Those fears and anxieties, seeking other outlets in vain, have rubbed off on the popular resentment and fear of refugees. They cannot be defused or dispersed in a direct confrontation with the other embodiment of extraterritoriality – the global elite drifting beyond the reach of human control, too powerful to be confronted. Refugees, on the other hand, are a sitting target for unloading surplus anguish.

According to the *Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les Réfugiés* (UNHCR) there are between 13 million and 18 million 'victims of enforced displacement' struggling for survival beyond the boundaries of their countries of origin (not counting the millions of 'internal' refugees in Burundi and Sri Lanka, Columbia and Angola, Sudan and Afghanistan, condemned to vagrancy by endless tribal wars). Of those, more than 6 million are in Asia, 7 to 8 million in Africa; there are 3 million Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. This is, to be sure, a conservative estimate. Not all refugees have been recognized (or claimed to be recognized) as such; only a percentage of displaced persons have been lucky enough to find themselves on UNHCR register and under their care. Of those on the UNHCR register, 83.2% are placed in camps in Africa, and 95.9% in Asia (in Europe, so far only 14.3% of the refugees have been locked in camps).

### **Laboratories of permanent transience**

The camps are the artifices of temporary installation made permanent through blocking their exits. The inmates cannot go back 'where they came from', as the countries they left do not want them back, their livelihoods have been destroyed, their homes burned or stolen.

But there is no road forward either: no government would see gladly an influx of homeless millions.

As to their new 'permanently temporary' location, the refugees are 'in it, but not of it'. They do not truly belong to the country on which territory their Portakabins have been assembled and tents pitched. They are separated from the rest of the host country by the invisible, but all the same thick and impenetrable veil of suspicion and resentment. They are suspended in a spatial void in which time has ground to a halt. Neither have they settled, nor are they on the move; they are neither sedentary nor nomads. In habitual terms in which humans' humanity is narrated, they are *ineffable*. They are Jacques Derrida's 'undecidables' made flesh. Among people like us, praised by others and priding ourselves for the skills of self-reflection, they are not only *untouchables*, but *unthinkables*. In a world spattered from brim to brim with imagined communities, they are the *unimaginables*. And it is by refusing them the right to be imagined that others, assembled in genuine or hoping-to-be-genuine communities, seek credibility for their own labours of imagination.

The proliferation of refugee camps is as integral a product/manifestation of globalization as the dense archipelago of the stopover nowherevilles through which the members of the new globetrotting elite move on their round-the-world voyages. The attribute the globetrotters and the refugees share is *extraterritoriality*: their not-truly belonging-to-the-place, being 'in' but not 'of' the space they physically occupy (the first in a succession of admittedly fleeting moments, the second in an infinitely extended series of moments). For all we know, the nowherevilles of the locked refugee camps, not unlike the halfway inns of the freely travelling multinational traders, may be the bridgeheads of the advancing extraterritoriality, or (in a longer perspective) the laboratories in which the de-semanticization of place, frailty and disposability of meanings, indeterminacy and plasticity of identities and above all the new *permanence of transience* (all constitutive tendencies of the 'liquid' phase of modernity) are experimented with under extreme conditions: tested in a way similar to that in which the limits of human pliability and submissiveness, and the ways of reaching such limits, were tested in the concentration camps of the 'solid' stage of modern history.

Like all the other nowherevilles, refugee camps are marked by an intended, inbuilt, pre-programmed transience. All such installations are conceived and planned as a hole in time as much as in space, a temporary suspension of the time sequence of identity building and territorial ascription. But the faces that the two varieties of nowherevilles show to their respective users/inmates differ sharply. The two kinds of extraterritoriality sediment, so to speak, at opposite poles of globalization.

The first offers transience as a facility chosen at will; the second makes it permanent – an irrevocable and ineluctable fate. This is a difference not unlike that which separates the two outfits of secure permanence – the gated communities of the discriminating rich and the ghettos of the discriminated poor. And the causes of difference are also similar: closely guarded and watched entries but wide-open exits on one side of the opposition – and largely indiscriminate entry but tightly sealed exits on the other. It is the locking of exits in particular that perpetuates the state of transience without replacing it with permanence. In refugee camps time is barred qualitative change. It is still time, but no longer history.

Refugee camps boast a new quality: a 'frozen transience', an ongoing, lasting state of temporariness, a duration patched together of moments none of which is lived through as an element of, let alone a contribution to, perpetuity. For the inmates of refugee camps, the prospect of long-term sequels and their consequences is not part of the experience. The inmates of refugee camps live, literally, from day to day – and the contents of daily life are unaffected by the knowledge that days combine into months and years. Like in prisons and 'hyper-ghettos' scrutinized and vividly described by Loïc Wacquant (2001: 43),

camp refugees 'learn to live, or rather survive [(sur)vivre] from day to day in the immediacy of the moment, bathing in . . . the despair brewing inside the walls'.

The rope fixing the refugees to their camp is plaited of push and pull forces. The powers ruling over the site on which the tents were pitched or the barracks assembled, and over the land around the camp, do whatever they can to prevent the camp inmates from leaking out and spilling over the adjacent territory. Even in the absence of armed guards at the exits the outside of the camp is, essentially, off limits for the camp's insiders. At the very best it is inhospitable, full of wary, unsympathetic and suspicious people eager to note, record and hold against the inmates any genuine or putative error and every false step the refugees may take – the kind of steps that the refugees, having been chased out of their element and ill at ease in an unfamiliar environment, are only too likely to take. In the land where their temporary/permanent tents have been pitched, refugees remain blatantly the 'outsiders', a threat to the security which the 'established' draw from their heretofore unquestioned daily routine. They are a challenge to the heretofore universally shared world-view and a source of dangers not-yet-confronted, ill fitting into the familiar slots and evading the habitual ways of problem solving (Elias and Scotson 1995: esp. 81,95).

This is, arguably, the most spectacular specimen of the 'established and outsiders' dialectics' (one that seems to have gained the pattern-setting role once occupied by the dialectics of master and slave), first described by Elias and Scotson. The 'established', using their power to define the situation and impose their definition on all those involved, tend to enclose the newcomers in an iron cage of stereotype, 'a highly simplified representation of social realities'. Stereotyping creates 'a black and white design' that leaves 'no room for diversities'. The outsiders are guilty until proved innocent, but since it is the established who combine the roles of prosecutor, examining magistrate and judge and thus simultaneously make the charges, sit in judgment and pronounce on the truth, the chances of acquittal are slim, if not nil. As Elias and Scotson found out, the more threatened the established population feels, the more their beliefs are likely to be driven 'towards extremes of illusion and doctrinaire rigidity'. And, faced with an influx of refugees, the established population has every reason to feel threatened. In addition to representing the 'great unknown' which all strangers embody, the refugees bring home distant noises of war and the stench of gutted homes and scorched villages that cannot but remind the established how easily the cocoon of their safe and familiar (safe *because* familiar) routine may be pierced or crushed. Refugees, as Bertold Brecht pointed out in *Die Landschaft des Exils*, is 'ein Bote des Unglücks' ('a harbinger of ill tidings').

Venturing from the camp to a nearby township, the refugees expose themselves to a kind of uncertainty they find difficult to bear after the stagnant and frozen, day-in-day-out routine of camp life. A few steps behind the perimeter of the camp they find themselves in a hostile environment. Their right of entry to 'the outside' is at best a moot question and may be challenged by any passer-by. Compared with such a wilderness outside, the inside of the camp may well pass for a safe haven. Only the reckless and the adventurous would wish to leave it for any considerable time, and fewer yet would dare to act on their wishes.

Using the terms derived from Loïc Wacquant's analyses (Wacquant 1994, see also *Amsterdams Sociologisch Tijdschrift* 1997), we may say that the refugee camps mix, blend and gel together the distinctive features of both the 'community ghetto' of the Ford-Keynes era and the 'hyperghetto' of our post-Fordist and post-Keynesian times. If 'community ghettos' were relatively self-sustained and self-reproducing social quasi-totalities complete with miniature replicas of the wider society's stratification, functional divisions and the institutions required to serve the complete inventory of communal life's needs, 'hyperghettos'

are anything but self-sustained communities. They are truncated, artificial and blatantly incomplete groupings of people, aggregates but not communities; topographical condensations unable to survive on their own. Once the elites managed to run out of the ghetto and stopped feeding the network of economic ventures that sustained (however precariously) the livelihood of the ghetto population, the agencies of state-managed care and control (the two functions, as a rule, closely intertwined) moved in. The 'hyperghetto' is suspended on strings that originate beyond its boundaries and most certainly beyond its control.

Michel Agier (forthcoming) found in the refugee camps the features of 'community ghettos' intertwined in a tight network of mutual dependency with the attributes of the 'hyperghetto'. We may surmise that such a combination tightens yet stronger the bond tying the inmates to the camp. The pull holding together the denizens of the 'community ghetto' and the push condensing the outcasts into a 'hyperghetto', each a powerful force in its own right, superimpose and mutually reinforce. In combination with the seething and festering hostility of the outside environment, they jointly generate an overwhelming, difficult to resist centripetal force, making all but redundant the techniques of enclosure and isolation developed by the managers and supervisors of Auschwitzes or Gulags. More than any other contrived social micro-worlds, refugee camps come close to Ervin Goffman's ideal type of 'total institution': they offer, by commission or by omission, a 'total life' from which there is no escape while effectively barring access to any other form of life.

Having abandoned or been forced out of their former and familiar milieu, refugees tend to be stripped of the identities that milieu defined, sustained and reproduced. Socially, they are 'zombies': their old identities survive mostly as ghosts – haunting the nights all the more painfully for being all but invisible in the camp's daylight. Even the most comfortable, prestigious and coveted among old identities turn into handicaps: they cramp the search for new identities better fit to the new milieu, prevent coming to grips with new realities and delay the recognition of the permanence of the new condition.

For all practical intents and purposes, the refugees have been cast in that intermediate, 'betwixt and between' stage of Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's three-stages passage<sup>13</sup> – but without this casting having been recognized for what it is, without setting the time for its duration, and above all without awareness that the return to the condition that preceded the present casting is no longer an option, and without any inkling of the nature of the new settings that may loom ahead. Let us recall that in the tripartite scheme of 'passage' the disrobing of the past role carriers of the social attributes and cultural tokens of the formerly enjoyed, but now withdrawn status (the social, power-assisted production of 'bare body', as Giorgio Agamben (1995) would say) was but a necessary preliminary stage for the re-robing of the 'socially naked' in the paraphernalia of their new social role. Social (often also bodily) nakedness was but a brief *intermezzo* separating the two dramatically distinct movements of the life opera – marking the separation between the two successively assumed sets of social rights and obligations.

It is different, though, in the case of refugees. Although their condition bears all the traits (and the consequences) of the social nakedness characteristic of the intermediate, transitory stage of passage (lack of social definition and codified rights and duties), it is neither an intermediate nor a transitory 'stage' leading to some specific, socially defined 'steady state'. In the plight of refugees, the condition designed as 'intermediateness incarnate' extends indefinitely (the truth that the dramatic fate of the Palestinian refugee camps has recently brought violently to public attention). Whatever 'steady state' may eventually emerge can be only an unplanned and unintended side-effect of the suspended or arrested development of the fluid, admittedly temporary and experimental attempts at sociation

imperceptibly freezing into stiff, no longer negotiable structures, holding the inmates more firmly than any amount of armed guards and barbed wires would.

The permanence of transitoriness; the durability of the transient; the objective determination un-reflected in the subjective consequentiality of actions; the perpetually under-defined social role, or more correctly an insertion into the life-flow without the anchor of a social role; all such and related features of liquid-modern life have been exposed and documented in Agier's findings. In the refugee camp's territorially fixed extraterritoriality they appear in a form much more extreme, undiluted and so better visible than they do in any other segment of contemporary society. One wonders to what extent the refugee camps are laboratories where (unwittingly perhaps, but no less forcefully for that reason) the new liquid-modern 'permanently transient' pattern of life is put to the test and rehearsed.

To what extent are the refugees' nowherevilles the advance samples of the world to come, and their inmates cast/pushed/forced into the role of its pioneer explorers? These are the kind of question that will be answered only in retrospect. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see now that (for instance) the Jews leaving the ghettos in the nineteenth century were the first to taste and fathom in full the incongruity of the assimilation project and the aporia of the self-assertion precept, later to be experienced by all denizens of emergent modernity. We begin to see now that the postcolonial multi-ethnic intelligentsia (like Ralph Singh of Naipaul's *Mimic Men* who could not forget having offered his favourite teacher an apple, like all well-bred English children are supposed to do, though he knew perfectly well that there were no apples on the Caribbean island where the school was built) were the first to taste and fathom the fatal flaws, incoherence and lack of cohesion of the identity-building precept that were to be shortly afterwards experienced by the rest of the liquid-modern world's inhabitants. Perhaps time will arrive for the avant-garde role of the refugees – in exploring the taste of nowhereville life and the stubborn permanence of transience – to become similarly evident.

## **The permanently unfinished project of humanity**

Only the kind of community that frequently appears these days in political discourse but can be seen nowhere else (not in real life and real time) – the *global* community, an inclusive yet not exclusive community matching Kant's vision of *allgemeine Vereinigung in der Menschengattung*, may lift the present-day refugees out of the un-place in which they have been cast.

All communities are imagined. The 'global community' is no exception to that rule. But imagination turns into a tangible, potent, effective integrating force when aided by socially produced and socially sustained institutions of collective self-identification and self-government, as it was in the case of modern nations wedded for better or worse and till-death-do-them-part to modern sovereign states. As far as the imagined *global* community is concerned, such an institutional network (woven from global agencies of democratic control, a globally binding legal system and globally upheld ethical principles) is largely absent. And this is, I suggest, a major, perhaps the principal, cause of the massive production of inhumanity called, euphemistically, the 'refugee problem'. It is also the major obstacle to the resolution of that problem.

At the time Kant jotted down his thoughts on the human, all-human community that Nature had decreed to be the destiny of the human species, individual freedom was the declared purpose of historical progress which men of practice, inspired and closely watched by men of thought, were expected and prodded to assist and accelerate.

Community of mankind and individual freedom were thought of as two faces of the same task (or – yet more to the point – as Siamese twins), since freedom (to quote Alain Finkielkraut's (1996) study of the legacy of the twentieth century published under the apt title *The Lost Humanity*) was conceived as tantamount to the 'irreducibility of the individual to his rank, status, community, nation, origins and pedigree'. The fates of the planetary community and of individual freedom were deemed, with good reason, to be inseparable. *Vereinigung der Menschengattung* and freedom of all its individual members could thrive together or wilt and die together, but never be born alone or survive in separation. Either the membership of the human species overrides all other, more particular assignments and allegiances when it comes to the formulation and allocation of man-made laws and rights, or the cause of human freedom as an inalienable human right is compromised or lost altogether. *Tertium non datur*.

That axiom lost fast its past self-evidence and came to be all but forgotten, as the humans liberated from confinement in hereditary estates and pedigrees were promptly incarcerated in the new triune prison of the territory/nation/state alliance and 'human rights' redefined in political practice, if not in philosophical theory, as the rights of personal union between the subject of the state, member of the nation and legitimate resident of the territory. 'Human community' is today as remote as it was at the beginning of modern adventure. In current visions of the future it tends to be assigned, if such assignment is contemplated at all, a place even more distant than two centuries ago. No longer is it seen as imminent or inescapable.

In his recent sober assessment of the current tendency, David Held (2002) finds the affirmation of 'the irreducible moral status of each and every person' and the rejection of 'the view of moral particularists that belonging to a given community limits and determines the moral worth of the individuals and the nature of their freedom' to be still outstanding, and widely seen as 'uncomfortable', tasks. Held notes a few hope-inspiring developments (notably the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights and the 1998 Statute of the International Criminal Court – though the latter still waits in vain to be ratified and is actively sabotaged by some of the major global players), but observes at the same time a 'strong temptation to simply put up the shutters and defend the position of some nations and countries only'. The post-11 September prospects are not particularly encouraging either. They contain a chance to 'strengthen our multilateral institutions and international legal agreements', but there is also a possibility of responses that 'could take us away from these fragile gains toward a world of further antagonisms and divisions – a distinctively uncivil society'. Held's overall summary is anything but optimistic: 'At the time of writing the signs are not good'. Our consolation, though (the only consolation available, but also – let me add – the only one humankind needs when falling on dark times), is the fact the 'history is still with us and can be made'.

Yes, indeed – history is anything but finished, the choices still can and, inevitably, will be made. One wonders, though, whether the choices already made in the last two centuries have brought us closer to the target envisaged by Kant; or whether, on the contrary, after two centuries of uninterrupted promotion, entrenchment and ascendance of the Trinitarian Principle, we have found ourselves further away from that target than we were at the start of the modern adventure.

The world is not humane just because it is made by human beings, and it does not become humane just because the human voice sounds in it, but only when it has become the object of discourse. We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be



human. The Greeks called this humanness which is achieved in the discourse of friendship *philanthropia*, 'love of man', since it manifests itself in a readiness to share the world with other men.

The above words of Hannah Arendt<sup>14</sup> could be – should be – read as prolegomena to all future efforts aimed at arresting the reverse drift and bringing history closer to the ideal of 'human community'. Following Lessing, her intellectual hero, Arendt avers that 'openness to others' is 'the precondition of "humanity" in every sense of the word . . . [T]ruly human dialogue differs from mere talk or even discussion in that it is entirely permeated by pleasure in the other person and what he says.'<sup>15</sup>

It was the great merit of Lessing, in Arendt's view, that 'he was glad for the sake of the infinite number of opinions that arise when men discuss the affairs of this world'. Lessing rejoiced in the very thing that has ever – or at least since Parmenides and Plato – distressed philosophers: that the truth, as soon as it is uttered, is immediately transformed into one opinion among many, is contested, reformulated, reduced to one subject of discourse among others. Lessing's greatness does not merely consist in a theoretical insight that there cannot be one single truth within the human world but in his gladness that it does not exist and that, therefore, the unending discourse among men will never cease as long as there are men at all. 'A single absolute truth . . . would have been the death of all those disputes . . . [a]nd this would have spelled the end of humanity.'<sup>16</sup>

The facts that others disagree with us (do not hold dear what we do but hold dear what we do not, believe human togetherness to benefit from being based on other rules than we consider to be superior, and above all doubt our claim to a hotline to absolute truth and so our bid to know for sure where the discussion must end before it started) *is not* an obstacle on the road to human community. But our conviction that our opinions are the whole truth, nothing but the truth and above all the sole truth that there is, and our belief that other people's truths, if different from ours, are 'mere opinions' *are* such an obstacle.

Historically, such convictions and such beliefs drew credibility from the material superiority and/or power of resistance of their holders – and the holders in question derived their strength from the entrenchment of the Trinitarian Rule. Indeed, the 'sovereignty complex' entrenched in the (un)holy union of territory, nation and state effectively bars the discourse that Lessing and Arendt took to be the 'precondition of humanity'. It allows the partners/adversaries to load the dice and stack the cards before the game of mutual communication starts, and break the debate before the cheat comes dangerously close to being called.

The Trinitarian Rule has a self-perpetuating momentum. It confirms its own truth as it gains ascendancy over human lives and minds. A world dominated by that rule is a world of 'nationally frustrated populations', which prodded by their frustration grow convinced that 'true freedom, true emancipation' could be attained only 'with full national emancipation' (Arendt 1986: 272) – that is, through the magic blend of nation with the territory and a sovereign state. It was the Trinitarian Rule that caused the frustration; it is the same rule that offers itself as the remedy. The pain suffered by the outcasts of the territorial/national/state alliance reaches its victims always already re-processed in the Trinitarian plant, complete with explanatory brochure and supplied with the foolproof recipe for cure, dressed as empirically grounded wisdom. In the course of its re-processing, the alliance is miraculously transmogrified from the curse into a blessing, from the cause of pain into the anaesthetic.

Gordian knots are notorious for the impossibility of untying them. Gordian knots can be only cut. The territorial/national/state alliance is such a knot, and as long as it stays

tied (or, more to the point, uncut), 'human rights' – the right to the respect due to the humanity of humans – are bound to seek salvation, in vain, in a further extension of the Trinitarian Rule, or risk strangulation.

In her essay on 'Humanity in dark times' Arendt concludes with a quotation from Lessing: 'Jeder sage, was ihm Wahrheit dünkt,/und die Wahrheit selbst sei Gott empfohlen' ('Let each man say what he deems truth,/and let truth itself be commended unto God') (Arendt 1991: 31). The message is quite straightforward. Commending the truth to God means leaving the question of truth (the question of 'who is right') open. The truth may only emerge at the far end of conversation – and in a genuine conversation (that is, a conversation that is not a soliloquy in disguise) no partner is certain to know, nor is able to know, what that end may be (if there is an end, that is). A speaker, and also a thinker who thinks in a 'speaking mode' cannot, as Franz Rosenzweig (1999) points out, 'anticipate anything; he must be able to wait because he depends on the word of the other; he requires time'. As Nathan Glazer, Rosenzweig's most acute scholar, suggests – there is 'a curious parallel' between Rosenzweig's model of a thinker in the 'speaking mode' and William James's processual/dialogical concept of truth: 'Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* truth, is *made* true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of the verifying itself, its *verification*. Its validity is the process of its *validation*.'<sup>17</sup> Indeed, affinity is striking – though for Rosenzweig the speech earnestly and hopefully engaged in a dialogue, a speech unsure-of-the-result-of-the-dialogue and therefore unsure-of-its-own-truth, is the principal substance of the 'event' in which truth is 'made', and the principal tool of 'making' it.

Truth is an eminently agonistic concept; it is born of the confrontation between beliefs resistant to reconciliation and between their carriers unwilling to compromise. Short of such a confrontation, the idea of 'truth' would hardly have occurred in the first place. 'Knowing how to go on' would be all one needed to know – and the setting in which one needs 'to go on', unless challenged and thus made 'unfamiliar' and shaken out of its 'self-evidence', tends to come complete with the unambiguous prescription for 'going on'. Disputing *truth* is a response to the 'cognitive dissonance'. It is prompted by the urge to devalue and disempower another reading of the setting and/or another prescription for acting that cast doubt on one's own reading and one's own action routine. That urge will grow in intensity the more vociferous and difficult to stifle the objections/obstacles become. The stake in disputing the truth, and the primary purpose of self-assertion, is the proof that the partner/adversary is in the wrong and therefore the objections are invalid and may be disregarded.

When it comes to disputing truth, the chances for an 'undistorted communication' as postulated by Jürgen Habermas become slim.<sup>18</sup> The protagonists would hardly resist the temptation of resorting to other, more effective means than the logical elegance and persuasive power of their arguments. They would rather do whatever they can to render the arguments of the adversary inconsequential, better still inaudible, and best of all never voiced in the first place due to the incapacitation of those who would have voiced them if they could. One argument that will stand the greatest chance of being raised is the ineligibility of the adversary as a partner-in-conversation – due to the adversary being inept, deceitful or otherwise unreliable, harbouring ill intentions or altogether inferior and sub-standard.

Were the choice available, refusing conversation or withdrawing from debate would be preferred to arguing the case. Entering argument is, after all, an oblique confirmation of the partner's credentials and a promise to follow the rules and the standards of the (counterfactually) *lege artis* and *bona fide* discourse. Above all, entering argument means, as Lessing pointed out, commending the truth to God; in more down-to-earth terms, it means making

of the outcome of the debate a hostage to fate. It is safer to declare the adversaries, if possible, *a priori* wrong, and proceed right away to deprive them of the ability to appeal against the verdict than attempt to engage in litigation and expose one's own case to cross-examination, therefore risking its being disallowed or overturned.

The expedience of disqualifying the adversary from the truth debate is most often used by the stronger side; not so much because of its particularly great iniquity as due to its greater resourcefulness. We may say that the ability to ignore adversaries and to close one's ears to the causes they promote is the index by which the relative volumes and power of resources may be measured. Conversely, going back on the refusal to debate and to negotiate the truth is all too often taken as a sign of weakness – a circumstance that makes the stronger (or wishing to demonstrate its superior strength) side yet more reluctant to abandon its rejectionist stance.

On the side of the stronger the refusal to talk may pass for the sign of 'being in the right', but for the opposite side the denial of the right to defend its cause such a refusal entails – and so by proxy the refusal to recognize its right to be listened to and taken seriously as a bearer of human rights, are the ultimate snubs and humiliations, offences that cannot be taken placidly without loss of human dignity. Rejection of Rozenzweig's style 'speaking thinking' has therefore its own self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing momentum.

In a letter objecting to my consideration of the possibility of cutting the 'schismogenetic chain' that tends to transform victims into victimizers (in 'Categorical Murder'), Antonina Zhelazkova, the indefatigable and uniquely perceptive ethnologist and dedicated explorer of the Balkans' apparently inexhaustible powder-keg of ethnic and any other animosities, wrote (in a private communication):

I do not accept that people are in a position to fight the urge of being killers after they were victims. You demand too much from the common people. It is usual for the victim to turn into a butcher. The poor man, as well as the poor in spirit whom you have helped, come to hate you . . . because they want to forget the past, the humiliation, the pain and the fact that they had achieved something with someone's help, out of someone's pity but not alone (in those cases when you take a person out of the bottom and send him to another social sphere). How to escape from the pain and humiliation – the natural thing is by killing or humiliating your executioner or benefactor. Or, by finding another, weaker person in order to triumph over him.

Humiliation is a powerful weapon; in addition, it is a boomerang-style weapon. It may be resorted to in order to demonstrate or prove the fundamental and irreconcilable inequality between the humiliating and the humiliated sides; contrary to such intention, it in fact authenticates, *verifies* their symmetry, sameness, parity.

The measure of humiliation invariably involved in every act of a refusal to converse is not, however, the sole reason for the refusal to be self-perpetuating (and so *verifying* the implausibility of the dialogue). In the frontier-land into which our planet is fast turning in the consequence of one-sided globalization,<sup>19</sup> repeated attempts to overwhelm, disempower and incapacitate the adversary all too often achieve their intended effect, though with results that go much beyond the perpetrators' anticipation or, for that matter, their liking. Large parts of Africa, Asia or Latin America are covered with lasting traces of the past disempowering campaigns: namely, the numerous *local* frontier-lands; side-effects or waste products which the forces benefiting from the *global* frontier-land conditions suffer ill, yet cannot help to sow and propagate.

The disempowering exercises 'succeed' if the adversary is disarmed beyond hope of

recovery – structures of authority are dismantled, social bonds shredded, customary sources of livelihood scorched and put out of operation (in the fashionable political parlour, the afflicted territories are dubbed ‘weak states’, though the term ‘state’, however qualified, can in this case be justified only as being used *sous rature*, as Derrida would say). If supported by high-tech armoury, words tend to become flesh, and so to obliterate their own need and purpose. In local frontier-lands, no one is left to talk to – QED.

In an Irish joke, a passer-by asked by a driver ‘how to get from here to Dublin’, answers: ‘If I wished to go to Dublin, I wouldn’t start from here’. Indeed, one can easily imagine a world better fit to journey towards Kant’s ‘universal unity of mankind’ than the world we happen to inhabit today, at the far end of the territory/nation/state Trinity era. But there is no such alternative world, and so no other site from which to start the journey. And yet not starting it, and starting without further delay, is – in this case beyond doubt – *not an option*.

The unity of the human species that Kant postulated may be, as he suggested, resonant with Nature’s intention – but it certainly does not seem ‘historically determined’. The continuing uncontrollability of the already global network of mutual dependence and ‘mutually assured vulnerability’ most certainly does not increase the chance of such unity. This only means, however, that at no other time has the keen search for common humanity, and the practice that follows such an assumption, been as urgent and imperative as it is now.

In the era of globalization, the cause and the politics of shared humanity face the most fateful among the many fateful steps they have made in their long history.

## Notes

1. As Giorgio Agamben discovered – see Agamben (1995).
2. Agamben (2000).
3. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), quoted by Arendt after Everyman’s Library version edited by E. J. Payne.
4. See the translators’ note in Agamben (2000: 143).
5. ‘Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?’, in Arendt (1993: 81–94).
6. Arendt, ‘On humanity in dark times’, in Arendt (1993: 15).
7. See the discussion in Agamben (1998: 137).
8. See discussion in Agamben (1998: 15ff).
9. Quoted in Ferro (1994).
10. See *Le Monde*, 25 October 2001, 17.
11. A charge eagerly resorted to, with great profit, by an ever widening range of contemporary politicians across the political spectrum, from LePen, Pia Kjörsgaard or *Vlaam Bloc* on the far right to the growing number of such as define themselves as ‘left of centre’.
12. *Guardian*, 26 November 2001.
13. The first stage consisting in the dismantling of the old identity, the third and last in assembling the new one; see van Gennep (1960); Turner (1969).
14. ‘On humanity in dark times: thoughts about Lessing’, in Arendt (1993), 24–25.
15. *Ibid.*, 15.
16. *Ibid.*, 26–27.
17. Quoted by Glatzer in *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, 33, after James (1907: 201). The intimate link between Rosenzweig and James’s ideas was first suggested by Ernst Simon in 1953.
18. Jürgen Habermas observes, correctly, that the expectation of universal consensus is built into any conversation and that without such an expectation communication would be all but inconceivable; what he does not say, though, is that if consensus is believed to be reached in ideal circumstances because of the ‘one and only truth’ waiting to be discovered and agreed upon, then something else is ‘built into’ any act of communication: the tendency to render all but one conversationalist, together with the variety of views they hold and herald, redundant. Marquard (1991) suggests that by this interpretation the ‘undistorted communication’ ideal looks like a posthumous vengeance of solipsism.
19. See the chapter ‘Living and dying in the planetary frontier-land’, in Bauman (2002).

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