



Living and Dying in the Planetary Frontier-Land

Zygmunt Bauman

Though events of September 11, 2001 have many meanings, it is tempting to suggest that their most seminal and longest lasting significance will ultimately prove to be the *symbolic end to the era of space*. To avoid misunderstanding: it is the *era* of space that has ended, not space itself. Space has lost its past importance; no longer is space and everything space-related—bulkiness, heaviness, entrenchment, size—cast into the center of human concerns.

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September 11 signified a symbolic, rather than the historically correct end of the era—since what happened on September 11, 2001 has only forced into public attention subterranean developments that went on for quite a long time before and took a few decades at least to mature. The jets stolen on their routes from Boston, like pebbles thrown into a container filled with an over-saturated solution, caused substances that had already, surreptitiously and unnoticed, radically altered the old chemical composition of the compound to abruptly crystallize and so to become suddenly visible to the naked eye. The terrorist assault on the best known landmarks of the globally best known city, committed in front of the most numerous TV cameras the modern media was able to gather in one place, easily won

the stature of globally legible signifier which other events, however dramatic and gory, could not dream of. The tragedy of September 11 showed, dramatically and spectacularly, how *global* events can truly be. It gave flesh to the heretofore abstract idea of global interdependence and the wholeness of the globe. For all those reasons, it fits the role of the symbolic end to the era of space better than any other event in recent memory.

The era of space started with the Chinese and Hadrian Walls of ancient empires, continued with the moats, draw-bridges, and turrets of medieval cities and culminated in the Maginot and Siegfried lines of modern states, the final expression of which was the Atlantic and Berlin Walls of supra-national military blocks. Throughout that era, territory was the most coveted of resources, the plum prize in any power struggle, the mark of distinction between the victors and the defeated. One could know who emerged victorious from the battle by finding out who stayed on the battlefield when the fight fizzled out. But above all, territory was *the prime guarantee of security*: it was in terms of the length and the depth of the controlled territory that the issues of security were pondered and tackled: as, for example, the motto that Englishmen's homes were their castles. Power was *territorial*, and so was the privacy and freedom from power's interference. "*Chez soi*," (being at home, at your own place) was a place with borders that could be made tight and impermeable; trespassing could be effectively barred and entry could be strictly regulated and controlled. Land was a shelter and a hideout: a place to which one could escape and inside which one could lock oneself up, "go underground" and feel safe. The powers-that-be which one wished to escape and hide from stopped at the borders.

This is all over now, and has been over for a considerable time. There was no dearth of signals to the end of an era of space (as one can easily gather from the antiquated flavour of the last paragraph's stories)—but that it is indeed definitely over became dazzlingly evident only on September 11. The events of September 11 made obvious that no one, however resourceful, distant or aloof, could anymore cut themselves off from the rest of the world.

It has also become clear that *the annihilation of the protective capacity of space is a double-edged sword*: no one can hide from blows, and blows can be plotted and delivered from however enormous a distance. Places no more protect, however strongly they are armed and fortified. Strength and weakness, threat and security have become now, essentially, *extraterritorial* (and diffuse) *issues that evade territorial* (and focused) *solutions*.

Until September 11, the search for solutions to globally-gestated threats tended to be replaced with (vain and ineffective) attempts to find localized and personalized exemptions from danger (think for instance of the huge demand for family nuclear shelters during the cold war period of "assured mutual destruction," or of the unstopably growing popularity of "gated communities" in times of rising urban violence and crime). The sources of this present day global *insecurity*, however, are located in what Manuel Castells has dubbed the "space of flows," a curious non-space space that can be characterized as un-colonized,

politically uncontrolled, de-regulated, extraterritorial. Because global insecurity has its roots in this space of flows it cannot be accessed, let alone effectively tackled, as long as the measures undertaken to cure or mitigate that insecurity are confined to but one or a selected few of the places it affects.

Because the global roots of this new *insecurity* seem so inaccessible, security concerns have shifted to the action field of safety, prompting a "safety overload." Safety is the only aspect of the certainty/security/safety triad that can be acted upon (whether effectively or not, is another matter) in the narrow frame of a single place. Above all, the safety-promoting action is the only one that can be *seen* as a proof that something is being done.

The difficult to master and awkward to use language of *global insecurity* (a semantically impoverished language with few if any syntactic rules) has been translated into the all-too-familiar, daily deployed and easily understood language of *personal safety*. In the longer run that translation may help us grasp the link between two all-too-often separately considered issues (global space and personal space), and may even enable the reverse translation (of local safety concerns into global security issues). For the time being, though, the one thing that seems to have become the current "common sense" is the new condition of the *mutually assured vulnerability* of all politically separated parts of the globe.

What has become more evident than ever before is that our degree of vulnerability can no more be measured by the size of the arsenal of high-tech weapons once developed with the (by now old-fashioned) *territorial wars* in mind. As Eric le Boucher wrote in *Le Monde* (October 25, 2001, p.17), "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.'" After September 11, 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 want to stay rich and be secure indeed.

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Global Frontier-Land

The new experience can be best summed up in the following thesis: *the global space* (that “space of flow,” that “non-spatial space”) *has assumed the character of a frontier-land.*

In the frontier-land, agility and cunning count more than the stack of guns. In the frontier-land, fences and stockades announce intentions rather than mark realities. In the frontier-land, the effort to give conflicts a territorial dimension, to pin divisions to the ground, seldom brings results. Suspected from the start to be ultimately ineffective, these territorial markers tend to be half-hearted anyway; wooden stakes signal the lack of self-assurance that stone walls embody and manifest. In the frontier-land warfare, trenches are seldom dug. The adversaries are known to be constantly on the move—their might and nuisance-making power lie in the speed, inconspicuousness, and secrecy of their moves. For all practical intents and purposes, the adversaries are *extraterritorial*. Capturing the territory they occupied yesterday does not mean today's victory, let alone the “termination of hostilities.” Most certainly, it does not assure a secure tomorrow.

In the frontier-land, the alliances and the frontlines that separate one side from its enemy are, like the adversaries themselves, in flux. Troops readily change their allegiances, while the dividing line between non-belligerents and those in active service is tenuous and easily shifted. As coalitions go, there are no stable marriages—only admittedly temporary cohabitations of convenience. Trust is the last thing to be offered, loyalty the last to be expected. To paraphrase Anthony Giddens's memorable concept, one could speak of “confluent alliance” and “confluent enmity.” Confluent alliance starts in the expectation of gain or more convenience and falls apart or is broken off once satisfaction fades off. Confluent enmity—even if burdened with a long history of animosity—tends to be nevertheless willingly and keenly suspended (for a time at least) if only the cooperation with the enemy promises more benefits than a showdown.

Starting the war against the Taliban, Donald H. Rumsfeld, the American secretary of defense, warned that this war “will not be waged by a grand alliance united to defeat an axis of hostile powers. Instead, it will involve floating coalitions of countries, which may change and evolve” (*International Herald Tribune*, September 28, 2001). His deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, seconded such a strategy, vindicating the return to the frontier-land conditions (or rather helping to reshape the global space after the frontier-land pattern), when he anticipated “shifting coalitions,” predicting that in the coming war “some nations might help with certain operations, and other could be called upon in a different capacity.” As he summed up the new military wisdom—“to be effective, we



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have to be flexible. We have to be adaptable” (*International Herald Tribune*, September 27, 2001). And flexible the operation that followed was indeed—though, inevitably, flexi-

bility cut both ways, and it was soon proved to mean something considerably less straightforward than what Rumsfeld or Wolfowitz meant it to mean.

The American air offensive against the Taliban proved to be an excellent example of confluent alliance. It began with the slogan “*with* Pakistanis against the terrorists” and with grooming Pakistan for the role of “crucial ally.” But as the air attacks began to drag on with little to show for the money and effort spent and a trail of destruction left behind, the alternative of paving the way for the ground assault by the vehemently anti-Pakistani Uzbeks and Tadjicks of the Northern Alliance became increasingly seductive. Indeed, the temptation proved to be irresistible—and the application of this changed strategy ended up with the new masters of the Taliban-cleansed Afghanistan proclaiming war “against

terrorists and *against* Pakistanis”... Similarly, in preparing for war, the American secretary of state, with the help of the British Prime Minister, courted Arab governments. The first stage of the war, however, wound up with a massacre of Arabic Taliban fighters perpetrated by the victorious gangs of the former ‘Northern Alliance’ and with it the demand that the country be cleansed of “foreigners,” whether friendly or hostile in their genuine or putative intentions.

When I write these words, the saga of shifting coalitions is far from reaching its denouement. United for the time being by the prospects of ample perks of office and the fresh memory of the awesome power of the Pentagon's reprisal for disobedience, the new rulers of Afghanistan are nevertheless as they have been before—the kind of bedfellows unlikely to share the bed for long. They probably are marking time, waiting for America's military targets to shift elsewhere.

And America's targets will shift. Once a bureaucratic institution acquires the capacity of performing a certain kind of task successfully, it will actively seek new occasions for that task to be performed again. When operating in a frontier-land, the chances are that America will seek and discover many more targets—many more terrorists—for the spectacularly efficient air-force that would allow it to do just that. Gary Young, the perceptive columnist of *The Guardian*, observed in his column on December 10, 2001, “defining a terrorist ... is entirely dependent on the balance of forces at any time. Those the Americans once financed they now seek to execute.”

Under frontier-land conditions, any war against *terrorists* can be won, given enough flying weapons and enough

money to goad and/or bribe “floating” and “flexible” allies into the role of foot soldiers. But the war against *terrorism* is un-winnable (not winnable conclusively) as long as the global space retains its ‘frontier-land’ character. The desire to keep coalitions ‘floating’ or ‘shifting’ is itself one of the paramount factors contributing to the perpetuation of the frontier-land nature of global space. The strategy of temporary coalitions of transient interest, the concomitant avoidance of firmly institutionalized structures empowered to elicit permanent obedience to universal rules, the resistance against the establishment of long-term, mutually binding and authoritatively supervised commitments—all stand between the present-day frontier-land and any prospect of replacing it with a global, politically serviced and controlled order. There is simply no prospect of gain in building and cementing global legal and political structures if, thanks to superior weapons and apparently inexhaustible resources, a superpower can reach its objectives without them more swiftly and at much lesser cost. And global authorities, once entrenched, may sooner or later pile up obstacles against that power’s unilateral determination of targets and the most expedient ways of hitting them; they will constraint the freedom of the attackers, or at least render their choices costlier to make.

It is indeed easy to understand why the ‘flexible coalition’ strategy, coupled with an emphatic rejection of any long-lasting and universally binding structures, may be tempting for those that have the wherewithal to fight on their own. By relying on their competitive superiority, they hope to benefit from the resulting uncertainty and would not wish to share their anticipated gains with the less resourceful and fortunate. The point is, though, that *this strategy can serve more than one master*—and once applied, may be widely used by all sorts of unintended, unanticipated, and undesirable actors. The ‘shifting alliances’ of the old-style frontier-land served equally well the cattle-barons and the lonely gunslingers with a prize on their heads.

Indeed, the perpetuation of global disorder suits the purposes of the terrorists as well as it serves the world-domination of those who wage war against them. One of the principal reasons for which the war against terrorism is un-winnable is the fact that both sides have vested interests in the perpetuation of the frontier-land conditions. There is, one may say, the un-gentlemanly agreement which neither side of the “war against terrorism” shows any intention of breaking: both sides militate against the imposition of constraints on their freedom to ignore or push aside the “laws of countries” whenever such laws feel inconvenient for the purpose at hand. This one coalition—the coalition against an equitable, universally binding, and democratically controlled global order—seems to be the sole one that staunchly resists “flexibility” and shows no inclination to “float.”

A couple or so centuries ago, when the pre-modern *ancien regime* (of societies sliced into poorly coordinated,

often separatist localities, and of law fragmented into an aggregate of privileges and deprivations) fell apart, blazing the trail for state- and anti-state terrorisms and making society a dangerous place, a vision of a new, supra-local, nation-state level of social integration emerged. That vision triggered and kept on course the nation-building and state-building efforts. Whether the practical effects of those efforts matched the visionary ideal or not, and in how many details, is another matter. What did matter in the long run was the fact that there was *a vision*, and with it an urgency to invade and conquer the emergent frontier-land in order to tame it, domesticate it, and otherwise make it safe for human habitation (that hard and by no means uniformly successful effort was to be called in retrospect the “civilizing process”). We may say that nation-state politics *preceded*, and *guided*, the establishment of the nation-state: in a sense, politics created its own object.

No comparable vision has emerged so far in our times, when the fluid-modern rendition of the *ancien regime* (in the shape of the planet sliced into sovereign nation-states with no universal law binding them all) is falling apart, blazing the trail for global state- and non-state terrorisms. There is no “politics of global order” in sight, boasting a vision wider than that of an average police precinct. In the absence of such a wider vision, the sole strategy for creating order consists of rounding up, incarcerating, and otherwise disempowering the agents who have been declared illegitimate by those unhampered in their own presumptions. Most certainly, little thought and even less political will have been thus far dedicated to the possible shape of democratic control over the forces currently emancipated from the extant institutions of legal and ethical control and free to deliver blows of their choice to the targets of their choice.

As Carl von Clausewitz put it, war is but a continuation of politics by other means. Of the war declared by the United States and Britain on terrorism, Jean Baudrillard has said that it is but a continuation of the *absence of politics* by other means” (*Le Monde*, November 3, 2001). In the absence of global politics and global political authority, violent clashes are only to be expected. And there will be always someone eager to decry the act of violence as terrorist, that is an illegitimate, criminal, and punishable act. The expressions “terrorism” and “war on terrorism” will remain hotly, essentially, contested concepts, and the actions they prompt will likewise remain as inconclusive as they are self-perpetuating and mutually reinvigorating.

Reconnaissance Battles

In a fluid milieu where old routines are quickly washed out and new ones hardly ever allotted enough time to acquire shape (let alone to solidify), groping in the darkness pierced by but a few random shafts of light (a plight ennobled in the currently fashionable sociological rhetoric with the name of “reflexivity”) is the sole available way of acting.



All action cannot but be experimental—though not in the orthodox sense of an “experiment” (that is, of a carefully designed test meant to prove or disprove the existence of a predicted/hypothesized/guessed regularity), but in the sense of a random search for one lucky move among many others that are ill-conceived and mistaken. Action proceeds through trials, errors, new trials and new errors—until one of the attempts brings a result that could, under the circumstances, pass for satisfactory.

In the absence of routine and tested, apodictically commanded or authoritatively endorsed recipes for success, actions need be, and tend to be, excessively abundant. Most of the moves are anticipated and feared to be unsuccessful, and the sole service they may be reasonably expected to render is to eliminate from future calculations a part of the mind-boggling multitude of possibilities. This profusion of trials does not guarantee success—but it sustains hope that among the many failed and wasted attempts one, at least, will be on target. George Bernard Shaw, an exquisite professional of the stage but an enthusiastic amateur of photography, is reputed to have insisted that, like the cod that needs to spawn thousands of eggs for one new fish to reach maturity, the photographer must take thousands of photographs if s/he wishes to produce one satisfactory print. Many, perhaps most, actions undertaken in the under-defined, under-determined, under-regulated global frontier-land seem to follow, by design or by default, the advice Shaw bequeathed to photographers. Prominent instances of such actions are the reconnaissance battles that have become the most common category of warfare (and violence in general) in our global frontier-land.

In military practice, “reconnaissance battles” have one purpose: to sift the grain of the possible hopeful from the chaff of the impossible or hopeless. Reconnaissance battles precede the setting of war objectives and the design of war strategy. They are meant to supply the hard facts military strategists need for the selection of feasible goals and to provide the range of realistic options from which future military actions may be selected.

In the case of reconnaissance battles, units are not sent into action in order to capture enemy territory, but to explore the enemy’s determination and endurance, the resources the enemy can command and the speed with which such resources may be brought to the battlefield. The units are ordered to lay bare the enemy’s strong points and weaknesses. Analysing the course of a reconnaissance battle, staff officers can hopefully make intelligent guesses concerning the enemy’s power of resistance and their capacity for a counter-attack, and so to suggest realistic war plans.

Reconnaissance battles bear a striking resemblance to “focus groups,” the modern politicians’ favourite means of anticipatory intelligence-gathering: testing the electorate’s possible reactions to steps considered, but not yet taken, before irreparable damage is caused by an ill-advised or wrongly calculated step. Indeed, a good deal of current military thinking, and the armament policies that thinking inspires, takes the form of “simulated reconnaissance battles,” conducted inside staff conference rooms or during military exercises on experimental ranges instead of on the temporarily unavailable battlefields.

Reconnaissance battles are the principal category of violence in an under-regulated environment. The current case of “under-regulation” is the result of both the progressive collapse of existing structures of authority and the appearance of new sites of action in which the question of legitimate authority has been never asked, let alone answered. The collapse of old authority structures affects all levels of social integration, but is particularly con-

spicuous and consequential on the global, and the political levels. Both levels have acquired a heretofore unprecedented importance amidst the totality of factors shaping the conditions under which lives are nowadays conducted, and both lack traditions that could be invoked and relied upon whenever new and untested, but hopefully correct and success-promising patterns of action, are sought.

On the planetary plane, the political void that has replaced a world tightly structured (after the pattern of the Gothic cathedrals rather than classical palaces) by the tensions arising from the mutual containment and reciprocal balancing of two superpowers provides a natural ground for reconnaissance battles. A political void is a constant invitation to bargain-by-force. Neither the outcome of the global game, nor its rules are predetermined; there are no global political institutions capable of systematically limiting the players’ choices and forcing or persuading them to respect those limits. The responses to the terrorist assault of September 11 have yet further exposed the essential lawlessness of the global frontier-land and the irresistible seductiveness of the catch-as-you-catch-can tactics.

To quote Madeleine Bunting’s summary of the Afghan war experience: “What the events of the past few days have starkly revealed is that the US had only one interest in this war in Afghanistan, capturing Bin Laden and destroying al-Qaeda; that imperative outstripped all considerations of Afghanistan’s future. So the timing of the attack was decided by US military preparedness rather than any coherent political strategy for the region, and the US war aim determined the crucial switch in tactics around

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November 4 when the US decided to throw its weight behind the unsavoury Northern Alliance by bombing the Taliban frontlines" (*The Guardian*, November 17, 2001). William Pfaff of the *International Herald Tribune* saw this sudden U-turn coming—being an inevitable consequence of the US' attitude to the world's problems: first, "Afghanistan has been substituted for terrorism, because Afghanistan is accessible to military power, and terrorism is not"—and then, inevitably, "official Washington [started] rapidly losing interest in political solutions. There is an increasing disposition toward brute force, and the use of whatever allies are at hand, even if that threatens to leave Afghanistan in chaos, and the war on terrorism stranded" (November 3, 2001). George F. Will, though from an opposite standpoint, endorsed that verdict on the logic of American strategy: "In spite of the secretary of state's coalition fetish, the administration understands the role of robust unilateralism. And neither lawyers citing 'international law' nor diplomats invoking 'world opinion' will prevent America from acting ... pre-emptively in self-defence" (*International Herald Tribune*, December 3, 2001). Note that both "international law" and "world opinion" appear in inverted commas.

It has been said that the Taliban, the targets of the most recent war on terrorism, were a British invention, managed by Americans, financed by Saudi Arabia, and put in place by Pakistan. The trouble with such a verdict is that it can only be pronounced with the benefit of retrospective wisdom. At the moment of this writing, the Taliban have been bombed out of existence and the vacant position of Afghanistan's nominal rulers has been filled by West-sponsored and anointed tribal chiefs. In the course of time, though, one would perhaps say of them much the same as one says now of the Taliban, with but minor modifications, once they fill the place vacated by the assorted terrorists presently defeated.

The condition of lawlessness, eagerly exploited in all reconnaissance battles, self-perpetuates with every successive attempt, to turn that lawlessness to one side or another's advantage. Each act of violence leads to retaliatory actions that invite responses in kind. As the balance of power and the range of opportunities shift, yesterday animosities are discarded or suspended for the sake of manning newly emerged front-lines. Enemies turn overnight into allies and allies into enemies, as new *ad hoc* coalitions cut across old *ad hoc* coalitions and plum prizes are hoped to be gained by a timely changing of sides. And so the waging of reconnaissance battles—designed to fathom the opportunities offered by continuous instability—becomes an increasingly tempting strategy, gladly resorted to, with a similar zeal and acumen, by those concerned with preserv-

ing their privileges, and those bent on gaining them, alike. Theorist Gregory Bateson's "schismogenetic chains" need no external boosting to perpetuate themselves: they expand and self-replicate, drawing all procreative energy they need from their own inner logic. As the cycle of offence-to-be-avenged-by-a-vendetta-to-be-avenged unravels, both sides (to use Knud Løgstrup terminology in *Opposing Kierkegaard*) lose their ability for sovereign, self-generated action and become ever more constrained in their next moves. Offences crying for vengeance self-propagate:

"There is no proportionality between what occasioned the affront and the reaction to it," because sides have "too high an opinion [of themselves] to tolerate the thought of ... having acted wrongly, and so offence is called for to deflect attention from [their own] misstep."

This Gordian knot cannot be untangled; it can be only cut—just like the interminable recycling of vendettas in

Euripides' Hellas had been cut by Sophocles' rule of law. The cycle of violent reconnaissance battles may grind to a halt only if there is nothing left to reconnoitre; if the universally binding and enforceable rules of conduct that allow no unilateral opting out and disallow the inverted comas when international laws and world opinion is invoked are put in place. When raising an outcry about the violation of human rights stops being a matter of (short-lived) political and military convenience. When, for instance, the principle of women's equality exploited to add ethical splendour to the assault on Afghanistan, is applied to the discrimination against the women of Kuwait or Saudi Arabia.

War As Vocation

The end of territorial wars coincided with the end of mass conscript armies. These two fateful departures were closely related in their turn to the passage from the solid to the liquid, frontier-land stage of modernity—to the end of the "era of space" and the emergence of the "era of speed," marked by the devaluation of space and (to deploy Paul Virilio's suggestions) bringing the velocity of television and tele-action in the 'speed-space' to their ultimate, speed-of-light limits.

Conscript armies have been replaced with professional and highly specialized army units, whose main function (at least in theory) is to destroy similarly space-confined targets—units of the enemy's professional army and the new 'sinews of war' of the liquid modernity era, that is the intelligence-gathering-and processing centres, broadcasting stations or fuel and armaments depots. Armies become leaner, nimbler, faster moving. They tend to be groomed to act in dispersion, in small groups, or individually, more reminiscent of swarms than the marching columns of yore. The

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ratio of technical equipment to human power needed to service them and operate is changing radically in favour of the first, and an ever greater portion of the skills once lodged in soldiers' memory and trained habits has been transferred to the electronic appliances of targeting, and increasingly also of tactical and strategic decision-making. (One recalls the joke about the automated factory of the future: it will employ but two living beings, a man and a dog. The man will be there to feed and stroke the dog, the dog will be there to prevent the man from touching any of the machinery. As professional armies go, such a future seems not that far away.)

The new fashion of conducting military action aims at excluding, possibly altogether, any face-to-face confrontation with the enemy. These hit-and-run tactics are hoped, among other things, to end the traditional banes of invading forces, like the threats of fraternization with the natives and the gradual softening of the conscripts' morale, which once had to be fought back with the help of intense surveillance and continuous ideological indoctrination of the troops. The new tactics of striking and killing at a distance, coupled with the shift of the task of target-selection onto inhuman (unfeeling and morally blind) parts of the war-machine, has also stretched to an unprecedented length the technique of 'adiaphorisation' of military action, stripping the action-on-command from ethical evaluation and moral inhibitions.

The soldier's task, like that of any other professional, is but "a job to be done." The propriety of performance is measured, like in the rest of the professions, in terms free from moral import. The sole ethical rules allowed to intervene in the evaluation of professional performance are first, following strictly the logic of hierarchical command, and second, completing the task set for the action with the least cost and in a manner approximating as closely as possible the commanders' briefing.

The new obsolescence of territorial occupation, the redundancy of mass conscript armies and the professionalization of the armed forces from top to bottom allowed wars to adjust to the liquid-modern conditions in general and to the operating mode that fits the nature of the "speed-space" in particular. Going to war in the times of conscript armies called for a protracted period of laborious ideological preparation. Patriotic emotions and feelings of shared threat had to be lifted to that high pitch at which the survival instincts are either dimmed and dis-empowered or dissolved in the cause of collective salvation. Those about to be called to arms had to be first made ready to die for the country. How far we have moved away from such stark necessities has been vividly shown recently by the promptness with which the readiness to sacrifice life for the cause has been condemned and classified as a symptom of religious fanaticism, cultural backwardness or barbarism—by



the countries that for many centuries represented martyrdom-for-a-cause as the proof of saintliness, that adorned their capitals with Cenotaphs around which they still gather annually to pay homage to the heroes who fell so that the nation could live, and that all along have used the cult of fallen soldiers to gain and defend their collective identities.

The advent of professional armies de-instrumentalized patriotic fervor. The collective frenzy now redundant for military purposes can be safely poured out and unloaded during football matches, Eurovision song contests, and Olympic games; it has been promptly harnessed to the service (and profit) of the entertainment industry. Whatever remains of it is time and again recycled ("spinned") to beef up support for one or another of the competing political teams, and sometimes is appealed to (with but meagre effect) to boost demand for domestic foods or films—but seldom if ever is resorted to, or needs be, to make going to the war feasible. This allows the war actions to be started quickly, overnight if need be, whenever the supreme commander of the armed forces considers such actions desirable and promising success—and in effect renders the proliferation of wars more rather than less probable. The

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Vietnam war was perhaps the last fought by American conscripts. Sending to war expeditionary forces composed of professionals alone does not involve the political risks comparable to those taken by Johnson or Nixon and is unlikely to trigger the kind of popular resentment that caused the protracted post-Vietnam trauma. Besides, that trauma was in large part due to the military defeat, not the dirtiness and immorality of carpet bombing villages and pouring napalm on villagers. The new smart bombs and stealth bombers coupled with the elimination of combat guarantee that war may be ineffective, but is defeat-proof.

Subjected to the professional conditions of service, soldiers have gained the status of employees, with all the attendant safeguards of their job conditions and the right to compensation in case these contractual standards are not met. Thanks to the high level of skills and know-how that the servicing of high-tech equipment demands, and the intense wear-and-tear of mental and emotional forces caused by the risks involved, soldiers belong to the relatively privileged sector of the labor market that offers better-than-average job security and job satisfaction. But perhaps the most striking effect of the new form of warfare is that during military actions it is the soldiers who enjoy the greatest personal

safety. It is the risks to their lives and bodies that are reduced to the minimum. As reporters with *The Observer* reported in the article "Unfinished Business," of December 9, 2001, "In a war won at the push of button, bravery does not count"—and it is neither needed nor called for, let me add. During the Afghan campaign, as of this writing seven soldiers have lost their lives, and only one as the result of enemy action; the others fell victim to "accidents at work," the usual risk of the most peaceful of professions (this compares with six journalists who were killed by the enemy since, unlike the soldiers, they had to be where the action was and not where it was remotely controlled).

Contemporary military professionals are no more a kind of brave, swashbuckling matador; they are more like the coolly professional, down-to-earth operators in a state-of-the-art abattoir. At the end of the day, it is solely military personnel casualties that truly count and are counted. And it is the soldiers' welfare that is meant when "saving lives" is proclaimed to be the commanders', and their political bosses', prime concern. The other casualties of war are "collateral." Pressed by Leslie Stahl of CBS about the half million children who died because of the United States' continuous military blockade of Iraq, Madeleine Albright, then U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, answered that "this was a difficult choice to take," but "we think that the price was worth paying." Civilian casualties of war are counted but reluctantly, and more often than not they are uncountable: after all, people killed by direct hits, destroyed by "daisy cutters", or in the course of "carpet bombings" are but a small fraction of the victims of war. Towns and villages are erased, panic is sown, crops and workshops are burnt, and thousands or millions of people are overnight transformed into homeless refugees.

In the military calculations presented in publicly digestible form by PR or political (the distinction is often difficult to make) spokesmen, all this is perhaps an unpleasant, but all the same unavoidable side-effect of action aimed, after all, against "enemy forces," not "innocent civilians." In the time of territorial conquest and conscript armies, when the whole of an "enemy nation" were actual or potential enemy soldiers, the entire population of the "enemy country" was seen (with good logical, if not moral, reasons) as a "legitimate target." Once war becomes a matter of professionals, these targets that are no longer "legitimate" become collateral damages, difficult to justify, let alone to defend in morally acceptable terms.

The ethical devastation caused by such a shift in classification is enormous, and not easy to grasp in full. "Collateral casualties" can appear to be like the uncomfortable side-effects of a potent medical drug: difficult to avoid, necessary to bear with for the sake of the therapy. "Collateral casualties" lose life because the damage done to them counts less in the total balance of the action's effects. They are disposable, "a price worth paying," and not because of what they

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have done or are expected to do, but because they happened to stand in the way of the bombers or lived, shopped or strolled, imprudently, in the vicinity of the professional armies' playground. Were it possible to bar the TV cameras' access to that playground, the "collateral damages" could be left off the calculations (and the action reports) altogether.

The ejection of war and the "killing business" in general from the focus of ethical debate, a focus in which they stood for most of human history, and, even more significantly, the removal of actions leading to the murderous effects of war from moral constraints including the ethical convictions of the actors, are perhaps the most seminal of the attributes of the new professional army. It sets the scene for new kinds of horrors, quite distinct from those born at the battlefields. Thus far, there is no sign of a new Geneva Convention meant to confine and limit the human devastation the new horrors portend.

Living Together in a Full World

As the ancients already noticed, books have their fates... The fate of Kant's little book on the idea of universal history and world-wide citizenship is as thought-provoking and illuminating as it has been peculiar. Conceived in Kant's tranquil Königsberg seclusion in 1784, this little book quietly gathered dust for two centuries in academic libraries—read only, mostly as a historic curiosity and without much excitement, by a few dedicated archivists of ideas. And after two centuries of exile to the footnotes and bibliographies of scholarly monographs, it all of a sudden burst into the very center of the "history of contemporaneity." These days, it is a hard task to find a learned study of our most recent history that would not quote Kant's "universal history" as a supreme authority and source of inspiration for all debate on global citizenship—itsself an issue that has suddenly found itself at the center of public attention.

The fate of this particular book may seem strange and baffling, but it holds in fact little mystery. Its secret is simple: it took the world two hundred years to reach the limits of a tendency that guided it since the beginning of modern times—but which Kant, having put it to a philosophical test, found in advance contrary to "what the Nature held to be its highest purpose." Kant observed that the planet we inhabit is a sphere—and thought through the consequences of that admittedly banal fact. And the consequences he explored were that we all stay and move on the surface of that sphere, have nowhere else to go, and hence are bound to live forever in each other's neighborhood and company. And so a "complete citizenship unification of the human species" is the



destiny Nature has chosen for us—the ultimate horizon of our universal history that, prompted and guided by reason and the instinct for 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 warns, there will be no empty space left for those of us who have found the already populated places too cramped or too uncongenial for comfort. And so

Thus far, there is no sign of a new Geneva Convention meant to confine and limit the human devastation the new horrors portend.

Nature commands us to view (reciprocal) hospitality as the supreme precept which we will need—and eventually will have to embrace—in order to seek the end to the long chain of trials and errors, the catastrophes the errors have caused, and the ruins left in the wake of the catastrophes. As Jacques Derrida would observe two hundred year later in *Cosmopolites de Tous Les Pays, Encore un Effort!*, Kant's propositions would easily expose present-day buzz-words like "culture of hospitality" or "ethics of hospitality" as mere

tautologies: "Hospitality is ethics itself, not one ethic among others. Ethics *is* hospitality." Indeed, if ethics, as Kant wished, is a work of reason, then hospitality is—must be or sooner or later become—ethically-guided humankind's first rule of conduct.

The world, though, took little notice; it seems that the world prefers to honor its philosophers by memorial plaques rather than by listening to them, let alone by following their advice. Philosophers might have been the main heroes of the Enlightenment lyrical drama, but the post-Enlightenment epic tragedy all but neglected its script. Busy with equating nations and states, states with sovereignty, and sovereignty with tightly 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 other, uncontrolled human movements, and manning the barriers with vigilant and heavily armed guards. Passports, visas, custom and immigration controls were among the major inventions of the art of modern government.

The advent of the modern state thus coincided with the emergence of the "Stateless person"—that latter day reincarnation, as Giorgio Agamben discovered in his *Homo Sacer*, of the sovereign right to exempt and to exclude any human being who has been cast off from the limits of human and divine laws; to make it into an "unworthy life" that can be destroyed without punishment—but whose destruction is devoid of all ethical or religious significance.

The full burden of the modern classifying, including-excluding zeal was, throughout the initial phase of modern

history, somewhat less exasperating, having been partly relieved by that other modern enterprise: opening up an unprecedentedly vast expanse of “virgin land” that could be used as a dumping ground for those unwanted, stateless persons, and act as a promised land for those who fell by the board from the vehicle of progress. No land of course was really “virgin” at the time Kant’s *Universal History* was sent to the printers; but plenty of lands had been already *made* virgin and many more were to be classified as “virgin” in the coming decades thanks to the enormous and still rapidly rising power differential between the fast industrializing center and the lagging behind periphery. The power of the metropolis was so overwhelming that it could declare extant human habitation of lands that it described as “primitive,” “backward,” and “savage” null and void, and summarily recast the population of such lands as collective bearers of “unworthy life”—thereby offering all the rest a license to kill. Somewhat later, the technique of summary exclusion from the human race developed during the conquest of distant lands was to be ricocheted back on Europe; as Aimé Cesaire pointed out in 1955 (quoted by Marc Ferro in his *Histoire des colonisations*)—what the Christian bourgeois (of Europe and its extensions) could not really forgive Hitler was not the crime of genocide, but the crime of having applied to Europe the colonialist actions that were borne up until then by the Arabs, the coolies of India, and the Negroes...

Colonization allowed Kant’s premonitions to gather dust. However, it also made them look, when finally dusted off, like a prophecy of apocalypse instead of the cheerful utopia Kant intended them to be. Kant’s vision looks now that way because—due to a misleading abundance of “no man’s land”—nothing needed to be done and so nothing was done in these intervening two centuries to prepare humanity for the revelation of the ultimate fullness of the world.

To get rid of domestic European “unworthy lives,” the lands decreed as virgin provided the Devil Islands, Botany Bays and other similar dumping grounds for European governments envious of a Russian Empire that ruled over the infinite permafrost expanses of Siberia. For Europeans fearing the outcasts’ lot, the “virginised lands” offered a promising alternative—a hide-out and a chance to “start a new life.” Irish villagers sought salvation from potato-blight famine at home; German, Swedish, and Polish peasants ran there from overcrowded villages and decaying townships with no jobs and no prospects; Jews sought safety from Russian pogroms. The untitled offspring of titled families traveled to the “frontiers of civilization” hoping to restore their power and wealth in military service, colonial administration, or business ventures, having first built a new world—a world needing to replace the “indolent” and “somnolent” native nobility with brand new elites, and so fit to provide the incomers with brand new career tracks. For many years, modernity, that intrinsically expansive and transgressive civilization, had no reason to worry: this civi-

lization made of the urge toward 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 a profusion of blank spots marked (provisionally, of course!) “here are lions,” and waiting to be spattered with new towns and criss-crossed with new road networks. Those distant blank spots were safety valves letting out the steam and protecting the metropolis from overheating. There were a lot of places for the adventurous to seek adventure, for the gamblers to try their luck, and for the defeated to attempt a reversal of bad fortune. The world was anything but full.

Well—it is now. No more Statues of Liberty promising to huddle the downtrodden and abandoned masses. No more escape tracks and hideouts for anyone but a few misfits and criminals. But (this being, arguably, the most striking effect of the world’s newly revealed fullness)—no more the safe and cozy *chez soi* either, as the events of the September 11 have proven dramatically and beyond reasonable doubt.

That manifestation of the changed existential condition took us unawares—as the change itself took us unprepared. The sacrosanct division between inside and outside, that charted the realm of existential security and set the itinerary for future transcendence, has been all but obliterated. There is no ‘outside’ 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. And no wonder—since all such institutions are local, and their sovereign power of feasible (or for that matter legitimate) action is locally circumscribed.

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 steps they have made in their long history. □

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